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THE SCARLET SOMBRERO



OR, The Sharp from Texas.

A Romance of Mining Life in New
Mexico, and Companion Story
to "The Rival Sharps."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.
THE RED SOMBRERO.

"HERE comes ther Revolver Sharp!"

"Yes, pard, an' now say yer prayers, fer ef
ther man with ther red sombrero says yer is
Trent Baxter, then yer hangs afore sunset, just
as Judge Lynch hes condemned ye to."

The words came from two men among a wild

"FLY LIKE A BIRD. GOOD HORSE FOR THE FORT. TO GIVE WARNING OF DEATH ON THE
TRAIL," AND THE SCARLET SOMBRERO RODE AWAY LIKE THE VERY WIND.

The Scarlet Sombrero.

...seen nowhere else except
...or in the mining regions of the
...costumes were picturesque in their
...and not a man of the two score but
...armed with revolvers and bowie, while a
...carried rifles.

Some had come to the scene mounted, others afoot, and all seemed influenced with one desire, one aim—to hang a man who stood in their midst, his hands securely bound behind his back, his neck encircled with a rope, the other end of which was thrown over the large limb of a tree beneath which he stood.

The man was also clad in frontier garb, a tall, broad-shouldered fellow of forty-five, with long, black hair and beard and a face not prepossessing though handsome.

The group of men were scouts, trappers, miners, settlers, and perhaps a few whose calling it known would place them also in the position of the man whom they had doomed to death at the rope's end.

The victim was accused of being the leader of a band of outlaws and a renegade.

Some one had recognized him in the settlements and the quick result was his seizure and trial, the latter being conducted in the off-hand but dangerous and merciless court of Judge Lynch.

After having been tried and condemned the prisoner urged that he was not Blue Jacket Bill, the outlaw chief, whom he was accused of being, and begged for time to give proof.

A few of the wiser heads had argued that he be spared a few days, when one of the crowd said he had seen, over in the settlement, one who knew the outlaw chief well, and volunteered to go and fetch him.

This was agreed to, and the crowd played cards, ran foot and horse races, and passed the time in other ways agreeable to themselves while the man was gone after the one in whose hands was the fate of the prisoner.

A cheer greeted the courier and the one who accompanied him, as they rode up, and the crowd hastily gathered about them, while all eyes were turned upon the stranger, and with considerable curiosity mingled with admiration.

He was a mere youth, scarcely eighteen, and rode a blood-bay horse whose equipments were of the Mexican style of saddle and bridle and profusely ornamented with silver.

The rider had a face to remember always; when once seen—a daring, resolute and intelligent face, yet one which might be considered really beautiful for a woman, so perfect were the features—so delicate and refined.

The brown waving hair falling upon his shoulders, and his face beardless, added to his effeminate look, while his splendid physique, tall, athletic and a perfect type of manhood, showed a strange combination of womanly face and manly form.

His attire was that of a Mexican gentleman, with white silk shirt and velvet jacket and bands trimmed with gold braid and buttons.

His head was sheltered with a broad-brimmed sombrero of light scarlet hue, encircled by a gold cord, the rim looped up with a pin of solid gold, representing a human eye formed of pearls, onyx and a diamond pupil.

The red sombrero gave him an odd, but picturesque appearance, and yet, young as he was, Redfern the Scout was known far and wide along the frontier as the "Gold Revolver Sharp," for his weapons were mounted with that precious metal.

To hardly any one of the crowd was he known personally, but to all by name and deeds, and it being recalled that he had once captured Blue Jacket Bill, the outlaw chief, down in New Mexico, they knew that the Red Sombrero was the one to decide as to whether the prisoner was the man to be hanged or not.

So the Scarlet Sombrero was greeted with a cheer, as much for himself as for the fact that now the Vigilantes had the chance to "hang, or not to hang," the accused, as the new evidence might warrant.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIGHT MAN.

THE prisoner viewed the youth as he came up with an expression full of anxiety.

His face was very white, like that of a man whose grave was dug and he was looking down into it, knowing his minutes were numbered.

The youth scarcely bestowed a glance upon the prisoner, but touched his red sombrero in a courtly way to the crowd, and riding to the top of the hill dismounted.

A man stepped forward to hold his horse, but Redfern said, quietly:

"Thank you, but he is trained to stand."

Then the "Judge" came forward. He was a miner, with a strong face, and who looked like a man who had been reared in a different atmosphere from the many about him.

"You are Mr. Redfern, sir, I believe?" he said, politely, gazing with interest into the face of the youth.

"I am Redfern, the Scout, sir. May I ask who it is I have the pleasure of meeting?"

"My name is Lynch, Scout Redfern, and, as the boys have made me the head of our border court, such as it is, they call me Judge Lynch, a not inappropriate name just now as we have sentenced a man to die."

"Your messenger said that he had been recognized as Trent Baxter, a New Mexican outlaw, who was better known as Blue Jacket Bill."

"Yes, and as there was some doubt we sent for you, as some one said you knew the prisoner well."

"I knew the outlaw chief Blue Jacket Bill, sir."

"And can decide for us if this man is the one we believe him to be?"

"Yes, Judge Lynch."

"Then your testimony hangs him, or sets him free. Please come with me and decide."

Redfern walked forward with the "Judge" to where the prisoner stood, the crowd making way for him.

The prisoner eyed their approach like an animal at bay.

Walking straight up to the condemned man, the young Gold Revolver Sharp gazed a second only into his face and said:

"You have sentenced the right man to be hanged, Judge Lynch, for this is Blue Jacket Bill, the Outlaw Chief."

A wild yell from the crowd greeted the announcement of Scarlet Sombrero, while the prisoner gave a groan of despair and reeled like one struck a severe blow.

But he rallied quickly, and said:

"Young man, you have placed upon your soul the life of an innocent man, for I am not the one you accuse me of being."

"Do you deny that we have met before?"

"I do."

"Do you deny that you are Trent Baxter?"

"No, I do not deny that, for that is my name."

"Were you not known in the mines of New Mexico as the Sharp from Texas?"

"I was never in Texas or New Mexico in my life."

"Do you deny that I arrested you upon the charge of Juan the Fox, at Devil's Ranch, where you were known as Blue Jacket Bill, chief of the road-agents known as the Blue Jackets?"

"You never arrested me on any such charge. I never saw you before, and you are simply mistaken in your man."

"I am not."

"Then you seek to win favor with this crowd by swearing away my life."

"I will not quarrel with a man with a rope around his neck, Trent Baxter, but I am willing to take my oath that you are the man whose life I once saved when the Veiled Lady of Mexico sought to kill you, and whom I tracked down until I discovered in you Blue Jacket Bill."

"I arrested you and took you to the fort, where one of your men came forward, declaring that he was Blue Jacket Bill, and that you were not; so you were set free, while he was afterward proven to be a madman—proven by a party of honest Texans, one claiming that he was his own son."

"So he also was set free, and it was found that the honest Texans were no more than the Blue Jackets, playing a ruse to free the man who had pretended to be the chief of the outlaws."

"You departed from New Mexico, and now I meet you face to face here, and if you are hanged, only justice will have been done."

Redfern spoke in a quiet but determined way, as he recounted the career of the doomed man, and not a person present doubted as to the identity of the prisoner.

But the latter gritted his teeth in a despairing sort of way, and cried:

"My God! I am not the man you deem me to be, and my life be upon your head."

"Yes, sleeping and waking, wherever you go, may you be haunted by the memory of having condemned to death an innocent man."

The voice of the prisoner rung out with an intense earnestness that seemed to carry truth with it, and the young scout doubtless felt the effect, for he stepped nearer the man and gazed fixedly into his eyes, as though to see if there was any mistake.

But the Red Sombrero was satisfied with his scrutiny for he said:

"Gentlemen, there is no mistake."

"This is your man," and he strode away toward his horse with the remark to Judge Lynch:

"I have a long ride ahead of me, sir, so must go at once."

"You are sure there is no mistake, Redfern?"

"Perfectly so, sir."

"I thank you for coming, sir, and hope some day we shall meet again—ah! the men have run him up!" and, as the "Judge" spoke, there came a stifled cry which ended in a curse and the prisoner was drawn up by over-willing hands into mid-air.

With only a glance at the swinging form his word had sent to his doom, the Scarlet Sombrero sprang into his saddle and dashed away from the scene of the tragedy.

He was quickly followed by the others, who left their victim swinging to and fro, in full sight of the Overland Trail, as a warning to other law-breakers upon the border, what their fate would be, if taken.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOY SCOUT'S ARRIVAL.

"PIONEER POST" was known to the army as Fort Blanco, and the commandant was a new man upon the frontier, though every inch a soldier.

The former commandant had been relieved from duty at his own request, preparatory to resigning from the army and enjoying a fortune left to him by a bachelor kinsman from whom he had expected nothing.

To his successor, who had won fame upon the Northern frontier as an Indian-fighter, the retiring commandant had been anxious to leave all in the very best shape, and make his coming and stay as pleasant as possible.

The commandant had been given various "notes" for his guidance, among which was one that read:

"Now absent upon special service in the Northern frontier is a young scout known on the roll as Roy Redfern, but who has won several sobriquets upon this border from certain peculiarities and accomplishments he is possessed of."

"More than that, he came to the fort one day over a year ago, bringing tidings of a train to be attacked, and acted as guide to the troops sent to the relief; very little is known, excepting that he calls himself Roy Redfern, yet if he knows, does not say whether he is American or Mexican."

"He asked for the place of scout and was put under Buckskin Sam, chief of scouts, yet he has never drawn a dollar of pay, and his services have been mostly special and on secret duty, in which he has proved himself an invaluable border detective, though in years he is still a boy."

"I have kept secret the fact that he is sent on detective duty, and thus holds an advantage by the fact being unknown."

"Some time since he arrested, upon the charge of a Mexican miner from Devil's Ranch, a gambler-miner as being the recent chief of a band of outlaws, known as the Blue Jackets."

"While I had Blue Jacket Bill, the said chief, a prisoner in the fort, another came and claimed to be the outlaw leader, so I released the prisoner, receiving the self-accused man, and greatly against Redfern's will."

"Soon after a party professing to be Texan ranchers came and said my man was a maniac, who pretended to be Blue Jacket Bill, and giving seeming proof, I released him, to discover soon after that the young scout was right, or so it seemed."

"Redfern took the track of the man he accused, and I have a letter, which I leave for your perusal, telling of the hanging of this same Blue Jacket Bill up in Colorado."

"He was also known as the Sharp from Texas, and Trent Baxter."

"The sobriquets by which the young scout was known in the mines are 'The Scarlet Hat,' 'Red Sombrero,' and 'The Gold Revolver Sharp,' and I can recommend him to you as being as true as steel, and only hope you may solve the mystery regarding him."

"As you can see by his letter, he speaks of going to Mexico, to the hacienda of a woman of mystery who dwells there, and who seems to hold some strange influence over the youth; but if you can keep him with you, I advise you to do so."

Such was the note left by the retiring commandant regarding the mysterious youth known as Redfern the Scout, whose word, as the reader has seen, caused the outlaw chief to be swung up to a tree in Colorado by "Judge Lynch" and his party of Regulators.

Colonel Rockwood at once took a deep interest in the young scout, and questioned his chief of scouts, Buckskin Sam* and his officers about Redfern, but he could learn from them nothing

*Major Sam S. Hall of Texas, a man who died a few years ago and left a national reputation behind him.—THE AUTHOR.

more about the youth, and could only await his return to the fort to report upon the special duty upon which he had been sent by the former commandant.

Pioneer Post was delightfully located, and though in a dangerous position it was a favorite with officers and men, as well as the families of those who resided there.

The accommodations were ample, comfortable, and the situation and surroundings all that could be wished, while the Comanches, Apaches, outlaws and the disturbing element in the mines a day's ride away, kept life from growing monotonous.

Colonel Martyn Rockwood entered upon his command under pleasant auspices all around.

He was popular with those officers who knew him, and admired by those who were acquainted with his record as a soldier.

A handsome, dashing fellow, he was a favorite with the ladies, and it was known that life at Fort Blanco would still continue to be as delightful as under its former commander, when fears had been entertained that some cross old officer would be sent there who would make all about him generally wretched.

A welcoming reception was given to Colonel Rockwood, by the officers of the post, and in the height of enjoyment an orderly reported the arrival of:

"Redfern the Scout, sir, and it's important to see you at once, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAR TRAIL.

A HORSEMAN was riding along a rough trail leading through New Mexico, and in the intense darkness of a cloudy night leaving it to the intelligence of his horse to pick his way.

Suddenly he drew rein, as the trail wound over the top of a ridge, and before him flashed the light of a camp-fire, a mile away.

But only for a minute, for then the light was no longer seen.

"The light of a camp-fire here," muttered the horseman.

"That means soldiers moving into the Indian country to strike a blow, or red-skins secretly making for the settlements to burn, pillage and kill.

"If neither, then it is a band of outlaws in hiding; but certainly one of the three, and I will do well to find out which."

So saying he dismounted, hitched his horse in a secure place of hiding and went forward on foot.

It was a rugged way that he took, for he followed no trail, and at last came to a cliff overlooking a narrow valley which was almost a canyon.

The darkness was intense, but a faint glimmer was seen among the rocks, and about it were moving forms, while the low hum of many voices came to the ears of the watcher.

"Indians, and plenty of them," he muttered, and then he seemed to be in a quandary, for he did not make a move for a long while.

At last he returned to his horse, remounted, and rode back upon the trail he had come.

This he held for a couple miles when he came to a stream and turned his horse down its course.

It was rough traveling, but the horse seemed to understand just what was expected of him and after a long jaunt of it, waded out upon an island formed by the stream and which was a wild and rocky spot half an acre in size.

"It's risky, Rover, but we must take the chances.

"They are not returning from a foray, or they would not be in hiding, and they will travel by day and must cross by the ford and camp to-morrow night within easy ride of the fort, or the settlement, whichever trail they take when they reach Valley Pass.

"I think we are right, Rover, and we'll risk it: but if some red-skin is curious enough to poke his nose in here then we will have the odds against us a hundred to one."

But the speaker, who addressed his horse as though he understood the situation fully, set about making himself comfortable for the balance of the night.

He found a good place for his horse among the rocks, where he could crop bunches of grass, and a place to spread his blankets, and in a very short while he was fast asleep.

When he awoke the dawn had come, and his ears detected a distant, rumbling sound.

Quickly he sprung to his horse and drew a bag over his head with the remark:

"I trust you, Rover, but I must be doubly sure, for they are coming!"

Then he saddled his horse, rolled up his blankets, and taking up a position among the rocks,

in the midst of some bushes, waited patiently, rifle in hand.

The daylight revealed that the horseman was the Gold Revolver Sharp, dressed, as when seen in Colorado a few months before, in his gorgeous Mexican costume, while the animal he rode was his splendid blood.

The position which he had taken on the island gave him a view of a ford across the stream a hundred yards above.

The trail led among rocks, coming out of a canyon, into the stream, which was a couple of feet deep, had a rapid current, which was broken into foam by many boulders scattered here and there in its course.

As the Scarlet Sombrero watched from his point of observation, he saw come into sight two horsemen.

They were Indians, as the one word of Redfern explained:

"Comanches!"

These two halted in the ford to water their ponies, and then rode slowly on, to disappear in a mountain pass.

Soon after a dozen came together, and passed on at a pace which showed that they were in no hurry.

Then came a large force under a chief, fully four-score in number, and following were a couple of hundred more, who made quite a halt at the ford.

Some of them rode up, some down the stream, to give their ponies more room to drink, away from the crowd, and one warrior came on to the island and attentively regarded it.

He was not thirty paces from the young scout on the rocks, and little suspected that a rifle covered his heart.

The force straggled on, but this Indian was curious about that island, and so he rode on until he came to a narrow opening among the rocks, which he could ride through.

Something there seemed to catch his eye, and he sprung to the ground and attentively regarded the tracks he saw there.

Then he moved on cautiously, leading his pony by his lariat, and disappeared among the rocks, just as the last stragglers of the band moved out of sight up the pass two hundred yards away.

Suddenly the warrior started, and his hand was raised to his lips to utter a yell, for his eyes had fallen upon the blood-red bay, with his Mexican saddle on, and muffled head, and he was going to give a warning to his comrades.

But the ringing war-cry was changed into a death-moan, as an arrow pierced his throat, and he dropped in his tracks.

"Just in time," muttered the youth, as he quickly fitted another arrow to the bow he carried and kept his eye upon the fallen form.

"If he had given that yell, I'd have had a race of it; but I guess he's dead."

He watched him for some time, at the same time keeping his eye upon the ford and saw another band of warriors cross, some forty in number.

The Indian pony still stood among the rocks, held by the dead hand of his rider, he believed, and Redfern was anxious to have all the Comanches go by, fearing the animal might give a neigh.

Soon after a small squad of red-skins crossed, and ten minutes after two more, and Redfern muttered, as he left his position among the bushes:

"I think those are all, but I must be cautious."

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

THE first act of the young scout was to slip down behind the Indian pony, his arrow held in his bow, and when the animal beheld him he gave a sudden snort of terror at sight of a white man and sprung forward.

But the arrow left the bow and the sharp point was buried in the neck just back of the head and he dropped dead almost falling upon his Indian master.

"It was a pity to kill you, pony, but then it had to be done as a frightened neigh would bring the band back upon me," and Redfern leant over and examined the traps of the red-skin.

"Yes, cooked meat, and in fighting trim, as I thought.

"Well, your war trail is ended," and the youth, by a quick movement of his hand tore the scalp from the head of the dead warrior and fastened it to a string of others hanging to his saddle.

"The string is growing," he said grimly, as he took the bag from the head of his horse, mounted and rode away from the island.

Reaching the ford he hurried on after the Comanches, riding very slowly along the large and well marked trail.

For several hours he held on, now and then reaching a point from whence far abroad he could see the two trailers who brought up the rear of the red-skins, but being careful to keep out of sight himself.

At last, at noon, he halted, for he knew that the red-skins would stop for an hour, or more.

He did not halt on the trail, but away from it he placed his horse, while he crept back to a hiding place to watch and eat his cold dinner.

The idea came to him that the warrior might be skinned and a search party sent back for him, to learn the cause of delay.

This very caution saved him, as he soon saw that the two warriors far in the rear were either not the last of the band, or there was a courier coming after them, for a red horseman came in sight, riding more swiftly than the others, and his eyes riveted upon the trail.

"He sees the iron-shod tracks of Rover, and suspects his comrades of being trailed.

"It is lucky I brought my bow and arrows along," and Redfern quickly fitted an arrow to the bow, while he placed another in position for quick use.

Another moment and the first arrow was sent upon its mission of death and the red horseman never knew what killed him.

The second arrow followed in a second, but the startled pony did not fall through wounded, and wheeling suddenly darted back down the trail, swerving wildly directly toward the ambushed scout, where a lariat was thrown unerringly and he was brought to a sudden halt that threw him, as the other end had been quickly wrapped around a small tree.

The fall of the pony was a hard one, and before he could rise Red Sombrero was by his side, his knife in hand; but seeing that there was no need to use it, as the poor horse already had received his death-blow, he turned to the rider.

His feather head-dress showed him to be a chief, and Red Sombrero decided that he had taken upon himself the task of being the last upon the trail, and was watching for any one who might have seen the track left by the war-party and followed it.

With a stern look upon his face, which made him look older and severe, he took the scalp of the Comanche chief as one who felt that he was doing a solemn duty that devolved upon him.

Then he placed the body by the pony, and mounting his own horse, rode once more slowly on his way.

He came to where the various bands had halted for rest and food, and muttered to himself:

"As I thought, they will camp to-night in the Pass of the Three Trails, and strike the settlements or fort at dawn.

"But I must make no mistake."

So on he went until nightfall, when he again tied his horse and went forward on foot, carrying his bow and arrows along, but leaving his rifle with his saddle.

He seemed to know that he would not have far to go, and in half an hour halted, for sounds reached his ears, low though they were, that told him the whole force of red-skins were camped not far from him, though they did not dare in that locality to build a fire.

He made a flank movement, skirting the Indian bivouac, until he felt sure that they were in the pass which led through the mountain range.

Once through this and three trails stretched away, one to the fort twenty miles distant, and another to the unguarded settlement about the same distance, and the third to the mining country thirty miles away.

"They intend to strike either the settlements or the fort, for if they meant to move against the mines they would not camp here.

"Now, to give the warning," and at a double quick the young scout returned to his horse.

He led him down the steep mountain-side to the plain, and crossing a stream where he watched him, he tightened his girths and mounted.

"Now, Rover, upon you and I many lives depend, so fly like a bird, good horse, for the fort, to give warning of death on the trail," and the Scarlet Sombrero rode away like the very wind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ALARM.

WHEN the orderly at Fort Blanco informed Colonel Rockwood that the young Revolver Sharp was without and wished to see him at

once, the commandant excused himself to the several ladies with whom he was conversing and went at once to his official quarters.

There was no "red tape" style to Colonel Rockwood, and he went at once, for he had been anxious for the arrival of the young scout, and from all he had heard of him he felt very sure that he was not one to send for him urgently unless the need was urgent.

He had heard also that Redfern always had a way of arriving and departing from the fort under cover of the night.

Whether intentional, or accident, no one knew of his going and coming other than the commandant, it was said.

When he entered his quarters he found there the young scout, pacing to and fro as though from anxiety.

He did not await even to be addressed, as was proper, but said quickly:

"Pardon me, sir, but you are Colonel Rockwood, the present commandant of Fort Blanco?"

The colonel was slightly taken aback, but responded:

"I am, and you are Redfern, the Scout?"

"Yes, sir, and I wish to inform you that a large band of Comanches are now about moving out of the Three Trails Pass, twenty miles from here, to attack either the fort, or the settlements."

"I left the pass two hours ago and pushed my horse for all he could stand."

"You surprise me, for the fort scouts have reported no movements among the Indians, though an uneasy feeling is prevailing. You know this?"

"You can see, sir, by these, that I have been near the Comanches, Colonel Rockwood," and Scarlet Sombrero held up the two scalps he had taken for the commandant to view.

"Ha! you have been in close quarters; but tell me exactly what you know, my young friend, of the movements of the Comanches, whom I certainly supposed were peacefully remaining in their mountain villages?"

"May I first ask you, sir, to order your force under arms, sir, the cavalry for a hard ride, as you have no time to lose?"

Colonel Rockwood glanced fixedly at the youth, his eye brightening, as though he was about to resent the request; but he changed his mind, and, calling to his orderly, told him to request the immediate presence of his adjutant and certain other officers he named, to come to him.

"Now, sir?" and he turned to Redfern.

"I was on my way to the fort, sir, and came through the Indian country to see what the situation was, when I came upon a force moving by night."

"The trail they were on I knew, and so headed them off, hiding in an island above which the ford, where they must cross, led."

"From a distance of little over a hundred yards I saw them pass and counted them."

"You were dangerously near them."

"Oh, I was safe enough, sir, as long as they did not get curious, which this one did," and Redfern touched the scalp of the warrior.

"You take scalps then?"

"Yes, sir, I am an avenger," was the quick reply, and the colonel said, as though anxious to change his thoughts:

"You counted them, you say?"

"Yes, sir; two came first, then eight or ten, followed by nearly a hundred, after which the main force of two hundred."

"Bringing up the rear were a hundred more, a small party of half a dozen, then two, and last a chief three miles behind."

"Here is his scalp, sir, and had I not seen him first, he would have had mine."

"Then you think there were fully five hundred warriors?"

"Very few less, sir, if any."

"And what is your idea of their intention?"

"To make a feint upon the fort, sir, and attack the settlements."

"You are doubtless right, Redfern; but here come my officers."

"Buckskin Sam's advice, sir, would also be valuable," suggested Redfern. "I will send for him," and an orderly was dispatched for the chief of scouts just as the adjutant and half a dozen officers entered the quarters.

They were in full dress, just from the entertainment, and seemed surprised at their summons, but knew something was wrong as soon as they beheld Redfern, whom they all greeted cordially.

Colonel Rockwood lost no time, but quickly explained the situation, Buckskin Sam entering meanwhile.

"I have sent to the barracks to turn the men

out, gentlemen, and so you must get into fighting trim at once, and report to me for orders," and the officers hastily departed for their quarters to obey, while Colonel Rockwood asked:

"Well, Hall, what do you think of this report?"

"If other than the Revolver Sharp brought it, sir, I would have my doubts, for three days ago I scouted through the Comanche country, as you remember, sir?" answered Buckskin Sam.

"But you have confidence in Redfern's report?"

"Perfect, sir, and I believe, as he says, a feint will be made upon the fort, while three-fourths of the Indians make a dash upon the settlements."

"Then ride with all haste with a dozen of your men, to warn the settlements, and I will send Major Sanford with four companies of cavalry and two light guns to follow you."

"And I can guide a force to the rear of the red-skins to cut them off in their retreat, if you will pardon me for making the suggestion, sir," said Redfern.

"The very idea, Redfern and Captain Plummer with two companies can go with you! But where will you guide them?"

"By a flank movement, sir, to Three Trails Pass."

"What do you think, Hall?"

"The very plan, sir, and Major Sanford will press them hard in the retreat."

"Suppose they do not attack the settlements, but the mines, or the fort?" asked the adjutant, who had returned.

"The mines they will not attack, sir, and it will be either the fort or settlements."

"If the latter, with the settlers warned by Buckskin Sam, and supported by Major Sanford, the Comanches can be beaten off while the fort has force enough to protect itself, and Captain Plummer head off the retreat when they are set going."

"Well said, Master Redfern! but, Hall, get off now at once, and the major will follow within twenty minutes."

"It is now just midnight, and the force can reach there in three hours," and as the chief of scouts departed Captain Plummer, a dashing young cavalry officer entered, ready for the field.

"Captain Plummer, you are to take three companies, and Scout Redfern here will guide you to where you can attack the Comanches in their retreat, be it from the fort or settlements."

"You are not too tired for the trip, Redfern?"

"Oh no, sir, for I have other horses here," and the young scout saluted politely, told Captain Plummer he would be ready in five minutes and left the quarters.

"A remarkable youth that, Captain Plummer?"

"Yes, Colonel Rockwood, and the more we see of him the less we know of him; but I am off, sir."

The major then entered, and fifteen minutes after Captain Plummer had ridden away with his three companies under the guidance of the Revolver Sharp, the force started for the support of the settlements, and the men in the fort were ready to greet the foe, though all seemed to be perfectly quiet within the stockade walls.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RED HORSEMEN.

THE Comanches seemed to feel that they had planned a master-stroke of cunning.

Their best warriors and horses had been picked for a raid upon the white settlements, and so quietly had they made their way to the starting-point from which to strike, that they did not believe that a soul knew of their being on the war-path.

It was true, that up to the time of their moving from their last resting-place, a warrior had not appeared who had in some way dropped out upon the line of march, and a chief, who had volunteered to follow the trail, and see that no foe was on their path, had not put in an appearance; but the time had come to move, and the Red Rangers could not wait for the tardy ones, for any slight mishap might have drawn them away and detained them.

So they moved out from their bivouac just one hour after midnight, and now they went in compact force, nearly half a thousand daring braves, to strike at their white foes for scalps and plunder.

A small party of half a hundred had taken the trail to Fort Blanco, to make a feint attack there, and thus prevent soldiers from being sent

to the settlements, in the belief that they were to be attacked.

This force reached the vicinity of Fort Blanco an hour before dawn, and after a rest until nearly daybreak, they made a charge directly upon the stockade gates.

They did not think that they could enter them, but they supposed only a sentinel was upon duty there, and before the soldiers could be brought from the barracks they could give the garrison a great fight, and cut out from the corrals adjoining the stockade walls, several hundred fine horses.

They fairly reached the sentry outpost before a shot was fired, and to their amazement and terror it did not come from a rifle, but from a twelve-pound cannon.

Its roar, and discharge of grape cut down horses and men, and a volley of infantry fire also emptied many a saddle.

The Comanches did not need a stronger hint to know that they were prepared for, and with wild yells of rage and terror commingled they fled, carrying off their wounded as best they could.

Those who had been selected for the cutting out of the fort horses from the corrals, had discovered that not an animal was to be found, and they fled too in dire alarm.

But their terror and woes did not end here as the roar of the guns sent them flying for shelter, while the stockade gates were thrown open and out rushed with a cheer two companies of cavalry, to hunt them down.

Then, in the early gray of breaking day the Comanches began to fly for their lives before the pursuing soldiers, while behind upon the field lay a dozen dead and as many more wounded warriors, with an equal number of ponies, either slain or dying.

Upon the lookout stood Colonel Rockwood, and as he saw now the force of the flying red-skins, he muttered:

"Redfern was right, for the settlement was the real point of attack."

Then he gave an order to a young officer to ride after Captain Drummond and tell him not to press the red-skins close, but to follow slowly so as to be a support to Captain Plummer at the pass.

When the sound of the pursuit was no longer heard, and as the sun came up over the mountain horizon, the distant boom of the two guns sent under Major Sanford came rolling up the valley, followed by the muffled rattle of small-arms, which told that the battle at the settlements had begun.

"Sanford has a hundred and ninety men, so should handle them easily, with the aid of forty or fifty settlers, and Plummer has eighty men with him at the pass, with a support of sixty more under Drummond, so the Comanches will be badly whipped as they have not two to one against us," said Colonel Rockwood to the group of officers gathered about him.

"The firing at the settlements has ceased, sir," said the adjutant as no longer could he hear the roar of the guns.

"Strange, is it not?"

"Pardon me, sir, but that means that the Comanches are retreating, and the artillery is no longer of any use, while as they go up the valley the mountain range cuts off from us all sound; but the major is pushing them your way be sure," said a gray-haired captain who had been long on the frontier, but was suffering from a hurt from his horse falling with him.

"That is it, is it Captain Creighton?"

"Well, the big fight will be at the pass then."

"Yes, sir, where Plummer heads them off, and that is just why that young devil Redfern wanted to guide the party that went there, for he loves a fight better than he does pay-day," assured Captain Creighton.

"I judge so, as he has never drawn a dollar since he has been in Government service."

"How does he live?"

"No one knows, Colonel: but some of the men who do not like him, aver that he is a road-agent when off to himself, for he has always got a pocket full of money!"

"Nonsense! he is as true as steel, I'll vouch for!" somewhat warmly responded the colonel.

"As I will too, sir: but there are lots of stories afloat about him, because he does not tell all he knows regarding himself!"

"He takes scalps, I am sorry to see, for he had two fresh ones to his belt last night," the colonel remarked in a tone that showed he regretted that such was the case.

"It seems to be a religious duty with him to do so, colonel, from some reason," Captain Creighton remarked, and for some time the mysterious Gold Revolver Sharp was the subject of

conversation, all agreeing that but for his timely warning the Red Rangers would have surprised and raided the settlement and gotten back to their mountain fastness in safety and triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT "THE PASS."

CAPTAIN PLUMMER had followed the guide Red Sombrero before and knew that he was a quick rider and went to the destination intended in as direct way as was possible.

Redfern did not show that he was in the least fatigued by his long jaunt from the upper country, and mounted upon a fresh horse, for he kept three at the fort, and all admitted that they were the best animals on the border, he set off at a pace that somewhat worried the troopers to keep up.

"We have to go around the head of the range, sir, so as to approach the pass as the Indians did, for if on their retreat they saw our trail leading into it, they would take to the ridges in small parties," explained Redfern to Captain Plummer, who responded gayly:

"You are the doctor, Redfern, so prescribe your medicine and we'll take it."

"We ought to reach position, sir, by dawn, so as to have a chance to get into ambush and have a good long rest for men and horses."

"Yes, but can you find a good place for an ambushade there?"

"Yes, sir, for half the force, and the others can come up mounted and charge the red-skins when in disorder, while the ambushers can mount and follow as a reserve, and we can keep them going at a lively pace."

"I would like to give them a good whipping before Major Sanford can come up."

"You can do it, sir," was the confident reply.

It was just dawn when the troopers came down a canyon and turned into the broad trail of the Comanches, while Redfern remarked quietly as he pointed to a dozen wolves snarling over a dark object in the trail.

"That is the chief I killed yesterday, so no Indian has been along since."

"How do you know?"

"He would have carried off his dead comrade sir, no matter what hurry he was in."

"I see; then you killed an Indian yesterday?"

"Yes, sir; here is his scalp."

"Oh, yes; you believe a scalp must be shown to prove an Indian is dead," said Captain Plummer, with a smile, and he added:

"But you have two fresh scalps, Redfern."

"I got the other, sir, back at the ford; but there is the place for an ambush, on the side of that hill, and the horses can be kept out of sight up this canyon, sir, with the remainder of the force."

"Fully forty men can hide there, sir, among the rocks, and the Indians will not dare attempt to go up and attack them."

"I will ride on to the pass, Captain Plummer, and return and report when they are coming."

"Very well, Redfern, and I will join you there and have one of the men bring you some breakfast; but I will bury that red-skin first which you left for the coyotes."

"Yes, sir, I never bury them," was the almost fierce reply of the youth, and yet a moment after he said, in his usually quiet way:

"There'll be more to bury soon, sir, and some soldiers, too."

With this he rode on toward the pass, while Captain Plummer examined his plan of ambush and position for his reserve up the canyon, while the men were sent into camp to eat breakfast.

Accompanied by a lieutenant and an orderly, he rode on toward the pass, after breakfast, but met Redfern on foot, who told him that it would be best to have no fresh trails near there, as the Indians might return, if not hotly pursued by Major Sanford, and skirt the mountains to the next pass leading up to their ranges.

So the horses were left where Redfern's roan mare was, in charge of the orderly, who handed to the young scout his breakfast, and the two officers accompanied him to the pass, half a mile distant.

There they had a grand view spread out before them, for the sun had risen and the deepest valleys only were in shadow.

"There is the trail to the settlements, sir, and this one goes to the fort, so you can look for red-skins retreating by both trails, and can see them over a mile away," and having pointed out the situation to the two officers, Redfern sat down on a rock and began to eat his breakfast.

Just as he had finished it he rose quickly, and said:

"I heard firing, and it was toward the settlements."

"I heard nothing, scout," said Captain Plummer.

"Nor I," the lieutenant added.

"I did, and I hear it now."

"But we would surely hear the cannon distinctly."

"No, sir, for the wind is down from the mountains, and it is small-arms I hear, and the sound is growing louder, so they are coming toward the pass."

"You are right, for I hear it now."

"As I do also," replied the officers.

Attentively they listened for some time, now and then hearing a volley of shots, and then silence following, until at last Redfern said:

"The Comanches are outfooting the troopers, sir."

"How do you know?"

"There is no more firing."

"You are sure they are retreating this way?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long before they arrive, do you think?"

The young scout glanced at the sun and said thoughtfully:

"The sun is two hours' high, and if the attack was made at dawn, and the Comanches were at once beaten off, their advance should come in sight very soon, sir, yonder, where you see that clump of pines."

Turning to his lieutenant Captain Plummer ordered him to return and notify the parties in ambush and reserve, and then he and Redfern withdrew to cover.

Not long after the youth said quickly:

"See there, sir!"

"Ah! I see them, but they are on the trail from the fort?"

"Yes, sir, but there come those from the settlements, and the latter will reach here about the same time."

"Will you wait and see their force, sir?"

"Yes; but where can Major Sanford be, and why are not those from the fort pursued?"

"The Comanches have outridden them, sir, that is all."

"Good! then we will have a chance to hit them hard before reinforcements arrive."

"Yes, sir," and as the retreating red-skins came in sight, pushing their horses rapidly, Captain Plummer hastily made an estimate of their number and then set off for his command at a trot, while the young scout said:

"I'll wait, sir, until they are close and then report."

Five minutes after the orderly had carried Captain Plummer's horse up the canyon, while that young officer stood among his ambushed men awaiting for the coming of the red-skins.

CHAPTER IX.

RED-SKINS AND BLUE JACKETS.

"I HEAR the Comanches in the pass, and it is strange that Redfern does not appear," said Captain Plummer anxiously as the young scout did not come.

But, as he uttered the words there rung out a sharp report mingled with the well-known war-cry of the Scarlet Sombrero, and into sight dashed that daring youth, half-turned around in his saddle and emptying his repeating rifle, as he rode, at the mass of Comanches rushing in hot chase after him.

"Ha! the boy will be killed!" cried Captain Plummer in alarm, as he beheld the scene from his place of ambush.

But on came Red Sombrero with a rush, just out of range of the arrows showering after him from a hundred yelling warriors in hot chase, while behind in the pass came others.

Not fearing a foe, believing only that it was the Red Sombrero alone they had to deal with, the Comanches urged their ponies hard to catch him, while the splendid roan, in a sweeping gallop, held her lead.

By the soldiers in ambush went Red Sombrero, his rifle at his back, and his splendid horse at a run, while he glanced defiantly back at the Comanches.

As he sped by he gave utterance to his wild war-cry, and taking it as a signal, Captain Plummer ordered sharply:

"Fire!"

Half a hundred carbines flashed almost as one, and as ponies, and warriors fell and rolled over, came a ringing cheer which drowned their red foes' war cries.

"Open with your revolvers, men! Fire!" shouted Captain Plummer, and upon the now terrified, struggling, dead and wounded mass of humanity and equines, the small-arms of the troopers opened.

The Comanches were thrown into disorder,

though they seemed about to try and scale the rocky hill to dislodge their foes, whom they felt they outnumbered, eight to one, when from up in the canyon came the war-cry of the Scarlet Sombrero, followed by the ringing notes of a bugle further off.

That at once decided the Comanches what course to pursue, and they huddled together back on their main body in the rear and then came forward with a rush, for they must pass their ambushed enemy, as they well knew that there was a large force of pursuing troopers in their rear.

In the mean time the ambushed troopers had had a chance to reload their carbines and revolvers, and were ready for the onslaught of the now desperate and maddened red-skins.

"I know it is against orders, sir, but please move up and open from the canyons, and we'll get them between two fires," cried Scarlet Sombrero to the lieutenant in command of the mounted reserve.

"I'll do it on your say so, Redfern, if I am court-martialed for it!" cried Lieutenant Gayle Barclay, and, leaving but half a dozen men with the horses, he rode forward with thirty men, and, as the carbines flashed from ambush once more, he opened in front of the rushing mass.

The effect was just what Redfern had counted on, for the Comanches drew up quickly, half turned their ponies, and for fully a minute stood under the withering fire from the hill-side, believing the force in front a very large one.

But knowing that their pursuers from the settlement must soon come up, they moved forward once more, though slowly, and in spite of the hot fire attempted to carry off their dead and wounded.

As they reached the mouth of the canyon, where it entered the valley, the Comanches seemed to recognize the small force they had to fight, for they gave vent to wild and defiant war-cries and a chief was seen calling to his men to follow him in a charge upon the handful of troopers.

But just then from toward the pass came a cheer and with thundering hoofs Captain Drummond and his men dashed into view, and the red warriors broke in wild confusion.

"Press them hard!" cried Captain Plummer as he rushed up to his horse and mounted, his men following his example, as the animals had been led forward.

Another moment, and Captain Plummer's force was in hot chase, with Captain Drummond and his men closing up rapidly the gap between them, and the weary pursuers under Major Sanford in the pass and hastening forward.

From that moment it became a panic for the Comanches, and a hot running fight for miles, when the ford was reached and the high ridge beyond became a shelter for the fugitives which they could hold against a larger force than their pursuers numbered.

This Red Sombrero whispered to Captain Plummer, who at once called a halt, and made known to Captain Drummond and Major Sanford, as they came up, the situation of affairs.

Buckskin Sam verified the statement of Redfern, and it was decided to hasten on the artillery and shell the red-skins once more into a retreat, and push them in terrified flight as far as the soldiers dare go.

The guns arrived soon after noon, and when the shells began to burst among the rocks and in the thick timber on the ridge, the Indians once more started in flight and until nightfall the pursuit was kept up, when the victorious soldiers went into camp, and Redfern was honored by being sent to the fort with dispatches announcing the victory.

CHAPTER X.

REDFERN'S RESIGNATION.

THE sun had risen when the sentinel reported a horseman coming toward the fort.

As he drew nearer it was seen to be Redfern the Scout, and his beautiful roan mare appeared to have had a hard ride of it since leaving the fort thirty hours before.

The fight at the fort had resulted in the quick flight of the red-skins, followed by Captain Drummond, and no losses to the garrison, but a severe blow to the Comanches.

The slain warriors had been buried, the dead ponies hauled off, and all appeared at the garrison as usual.

Colonel Rockwood was an early riser, and received Redfern as he came to his quarters with a look of some anxiety, while he asked, quickly:

"Any disaster to the command in the field, Redfern?"

"Only the losses met with in the two fights and pursuit, sir"

"Here are Major Sanford's, Captain Plummer's and Captain Drummond's reports of their separate commands, which I was honored by being the bearer of, Colonel Rockwood."

The colonel hastily read the unsealed dispatches, saying aloud as he did so:

"Bravo for Sanford, for he jumped upon the Indians just as they reached the settlements, and their losses were heavy, while his were slight."

"And he pursued rapidly, though out-run, and came up as Plummer had given them a sound thrashing and was in full chase with Drummond as a support."

"Now to Plummer's report," and after reading it, the colonel said:

"I congratulate you, Redfern, upon the high manner in which you are referred to as rendering invaluable services, while Lieutenant Barclay speaks of you urging him to prompt action, which resulted well, and Major Sanford says that you led in the pursuit, and as the saving of the settlements and defeat of the Comanches were owing to your report of the recent movements of the hostiles, he requests you to bring me these dispatches."

"I congratulate you, Redfern, and shall mention you in my report to the Department as one deserving an appointment into the army."

"I thank you, Colonel Rockwood, but it is my intention to retire from the service, sir, and I shall tender my resignation to the chief of scouts upon his return."

"Why, my dear fellow, what does this mean?"

"I became a scout, sir—a frontier rover, as it were—to avenge certain wrongs, and I took an oath to repay tenfold life for life, sir."

"And you have done so, Redfern?"

The youth did not reply immediately, but turning, he unhooked from his belt a mass of long, black hair, and held up the grim trophies to the colonel's view, while he said, grimly:

"Here is my string, sir, and there is a Mexican *onza* in gold for each one in my belt, to be given to the orphan children of the frontier whose parents have fallen by red-skin hands."

"My young friend, I can the better now understand your hatred of the Indian, and in all that your words imply that you have suffered, you have my deepest sympathy; but why will you not enter the army, if I gain for you an appointment as a second lieutenant?"

"I have other duties, sir, to demand my time, and I must refuse, though I thank you exceedingly for your kindness."

"Well, you know best; but now go to your quarters, and in half an hour return, and breakfast with me, Mr. Redfern," said the colonel, kindly.

The young scout seemed pleased with the compliment extended to him, and at the appointed time returned, rigged out in his handsomest Mexican suit, silk sash and all.

He found that the colonel had also asked Captain Creighton and several other officers to breakfast, and three or four ladies as well; but Redfern was as courteous as a cavalier, and seemed not at all abashed by the company he found himself in, while the most critical observer present could not find a flaw in his table manners, which the more added to the mystery hanging over him, for certainly in refined life alone he could have learned what he knew.

The following day the cavalry force returned, and the resignation of the youth was handed in to Sam Hall, the chief of scouts, who in vain tried to urge Redfern to reconsider his determination.

As he could not change the youth's decision, Buckskin Sam approved of the resignation and sent it to Colonel Rockwood who found it well worded and written in a bold hand full of character.

He also affixed his own signature in approval, with regret at the determination of Scout Redfern, and that night the youth left the fort, mounted upon a fine iron-gray horse, and with his roan mare and Rover following, the former loaded with his traps in a pack-saddle.

"If I need your services, Redfern, how can I ever find you?" asked Colonel Rockwood, as he bade the youth farewell.

"Address Roy Redfern, El Paso, Texas, sir, and the letter will reach me," was the answer, and Colonel Rockwood at once wrote it down, and filed it away with a number of papers marked:

"Redfern's Reports of Secret Service."

The following day all the fort learned of Redfern's departure, and much regret was felt by many, while his going but added to the mystery about him.

"I predict that we shall hear of him and see him again," said Buckskin Sam, at his mess table the same evening.

"I overheard the paymaster tell the adjutant that he did not draw a dollar of his pay, but left an order for it to be sent to some orphan asylum," said Texas Charlie, a well known scout.

"We have not heard the last of the Revolver Sharp, pard," repeated Buckskin Sam, in a prophetic way.

And Buckskin Sam was right.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MINER OF YELLOW CANYON.

UPON a pleasant Sabbath afternoon, a man sat in front of a log cabin situated at the head of a wild and picturesque valley in the mining country of New Mexico, and several score miles from Fort Blanco.

Though a miner, the one who sat there, before a rude table of his own manufacture, writing, was well-dressed, and wore a white shirt and cravat, for on every Sunday Miner Gray St. John made it a sacred duty to "dress up," and to write a letter to the loved ones at home.

He was a man of noble presence, with long flowing hair and beard, and a face full of kindness and intelligence.

Although scarcely over forty years of age his hair and beard were threaded with silver, as though his life had known much of friendship and sorrow.

His cabin was a comfortable one of two rooms, with a shed along the front, and it was situated upon a shelf of rock with a cliff behind it, and at the head of the canyon.

The canyon narrowed below and was fenced across with fallen trees, forming a barrier to prevent a horse from straying away, for an animal was feeding not far from the cabin.

Unless to visit the secluded little home no one would have gone to that wild and desolate spot, it would seem.

And yet the miner, Gray St. John, had gone there, and more, had "struck it rich" in the lead he worked only a few rods from his cabin.

A neigh from his horse caused the miner to look up quickly from his letter-writing, and reach for a rifle that stood near him.

Gazing down the canyon he soon saw a horseman come in sight, followed by two led animals, one of which bore a pack-saddle.

"It is that handsome young fellow they call the Gold Revolver Sharp," said the miner, rising and descending to the level of the canyon, as he saw the youth with the Scarlet Sombrero dismount, lower the bars and lead his horses within the inclosure.

"Ah, my young friend, I am glad to see you indeed," and the miner grasped the hand of the youth warmly, who replied:

"I was not sure you would not be angry with me, as I was the one who arrested your partner, Mr. St. John, and in fact brought him to the rope's end."

"Yes, I felt that you believed you were doing your duty, though it was hard indeed for me to believe that Trent Baxter was the villain you charged him with being."

"So he is really dead, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I had heard so last Sunday, when I went to Devil's Ranch after my supplies, for the miners were talking the matter over, but I was not sure of his death."

"Yes, he was hanged by Vigilantes in Colorado two months ago, Miner St. John, for he was recognized as an outlaw, and given a border trial; but some felt doubt as to whether he was the right man or not, and I was sent for, and my testimony hanged him."

"You saw him hanged, then, Redfern?"

"I did, sir."

"It is hard to believe that he was a villain, and yet at times it seemed to me that he had in some way crossed my path under an evil influence; but I do not recall when and where, and I guess, after all, it is only imagination."

"You say that he was really the outlaw chief Blue Jacket?"

"Yes, Miner St. John; but when were you in Devil's Ranch last?"

"To-day a week ago."

"Do you recall seeing any of Trent Baxter's particular pards there?"

"No, but all were talking of him."

"And the Mexican, Juan the Fox?"

"Has doubtless left the mines, for he has not been seen since he gave you the information about Baxter's being Blue Jacket Bill; but how goes all at the fort?"

"Very well indeed, for the Comanches made a raid upon the settlement a few nights ago, and were beaten off with severe loss and driven

back to their stronghold villages," and Redfern told the story of the attack, most modestly referring to himself, however."

Then he said:

"I wish to tell you that I have resigned from the service, Miner St. John."

"Indeed! and why do so when you were winning such a name, for I heard much of you when up at the camps, Redfern, and all in your praise?"

"Well, sir, I thought of going to Mexico upon a visit, and then I have a little business of my own that I wish to look after."

"That reminds me to ask a favor of you, my young friend."

"Certainly, Miner St. John, how can I serve you?"

"Well, I must tell you a little of my history and of the two on this earth most dear to me, to explain all that I wish you to do."

"I will listen with pleasure, sir."

"You know that Trent Baxter, the Sharp from Texas, saved my life by firing upon Juan the Fox who was preparing to assassinate me in my mine, and had me covered?"

"So you told me, sir, on a former visit I made to you."

"Now I urged Baxter to share my diggings with me equally; but this he refused, though he did, at my urging, come here to live and accept a fourth of what the mine panned out, leaving, however, his dust with me to take care of."

"Then came his arrest by you, his release from the fort, and his departure for parts unknown."

"Now you tell me he has been hanged?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have, strange to say, always had a presentiment that I would die suddenly, with my boots on, as they say here in the mines."

"In the long ago, when a farmer lad, I attended a country school, going and coming upon my pony each day."

"I loved a sweet young girl by the name of Ethel Enders, and among my many rivals was Hugh Hammond, the son of the district judge, who was a man of wealth and influence."

"Hugh saw that Ethel loved me and plotted to get rid of me, so one day borrowed my rifle, drew out the bullet, and as a party of us were going home together that evening I returned with Ethel to the school-house for a book, and my rival followed me there."

"I need only say that he insulted me grossly, struck me with his whip and forced me to fight a duel with him before Ethel Enders."

"She bravely gave the word, and I fell at his fire, and he fled, for, of course, I fired only powder at him, the bullet being gone."

"I nearly died, but at last rallied, and in time married Ethel Enders."

"Hugh was not heard of again, was reported lost at sea, his father died leaving nothing, and, somehow, adversity dogged my steps continually, until at last I left my wife and daughter Ethel, whose likenesses I showed you, and came here to hunt for a fortune."

"At first ill-fortune still dogged my steps; but at last I struck it rich, as you know, and I have sent home a large sum, to make my loved ones comfortable, while I have hidden away here a much larger sum, in fact I am a rich man."

"But, Redfern, I still have this presentiment of evil haunting me, and only last night, in my dreams, was I struggling for life with my old foe, Hugh Hammond, while, strangest of all, I felt that he gave me my death-wound, and God knows I fear that some day he will do so," and the miner passed his hand across his forehead and seemed deeply moved at the presentiment of evil that crowded upon him by day and night.

CHAPTER XII.

A SACRED TRUST.

REDFERN had listened to the miner's story with the deepest interest.

He had before heard from him something of his past, and of his loved ones, and he felt that it was for them that Miner Gray St. John wished to ask of him a favor.

The likenesses of his wife and child lay by him upon the rustic table, where he had been writing, and Redfern took them up and regarded them intently.

The sad, lovely face of the wife and mother he seemed drawn toward most warmly, while the beautiful face of the girl-woman, just a year over the threshold of her teens, completely won his heart, the first time he had viewed it months before.

It was a face of exquisite beauty, the form just budding into perfect womanhood, and nobility of soul was stamped upon each feature.

"Do you wonder that I love them so, Redfern," said the miner feelingly.

"I do not, indeed I do not!" was the honest response.

"They are all I have in the world, and thank Heaven if I do go, I'll leave them rich in this world's goods."

"This mine I have is richer far than men believe, and besides what I have sent my wife, I have placed in different banks an equal sum for my child, while, as I told you, I have even more hidden away here, and there is far more to dig out of the earth."

"I tell you this, my boy, because I trust you, and depend upon you in case of my death."

"Why, miner, you must not yield to such thoughts, for dreams amount to nothing, and I have awakened hundreds of times with Indians scalping me and laughed to find it was only a nightmare."

"No, no, you'll live a long time, have a fortune and enjoy it with those you love."

The miner shook his head at this hopeful view of the situation taken by the youth, and said:

"I wish I could think so, but I cannot!"

"Then why do you not leave the mine to be worked by some honest miner on shares and go at once to your wife and child?"

"I have thought of that, and had decided to do so, when I had a dream that terrified me, for when I felt that I was dying by the hand of Hugh Hammond, it was in the presence of my wife and daughter."

"No, no, he would follow me there, for it is written that I shall die by the hand of Hugh Hammond!"

In vain did Redfern seek to cheer the miner, to drive away his thoughts of coming evil to himself, for he was set in his belief and nothing would change him.

At last the young Revolver Sharp said in a half-earnest way, half-jocular:

"Well, miner, if your foe does take your life I'll avenge you, rest assured."

The miner started and glanced earnestly at him.

Then he asked:

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"You have pledged me to grant me a favor?"

"Yes."

"It is, if I am slain, you will come here and get my gold, for its hiding-place I will show you, and take it to my wife and child."

"I will give you the bank-books where my money for little Ethel is deposited, and you will give them to her, and pay your own expenses out of my gold."

"You will also find for me an honest miner to work my mine on a share of one-third for himself, and if you will be the one I shall be more than glad."

"I have your pledge to do this, have I not, Redfern?"

"Yes, if you are killed by the foe you seem to dread will take your life."

"Give me your hand on the pledge."

"I do," and Redfern extended his hand, which the miner grasped and wrung warmly.

"Now one thing more."

"Yes, sir."

"You said that you would avenge me?"

"I did."

"Did you mean it?"

"Yes, if you ask it."

"I do."

"You wish me to avenge your death, if you die by the hand of Hugh Hammond?"

"I do ask it for their sake."

"I will do so, Miner St. John."

"I thank you, Redfern, from my inmost soul, for their sake."

"I am not revengeful, but that man cruelly wronged me in the long ago, and if his hatred has not died with years, and he tracks me to the grave, then I wish to feel that I am avenged."

"Then rest easy with the knowledge that you will be; but I thought he was lost at sea."

"It was so said."

"You doubted it?"

"I have never believed him dead."

"What kind of looking man is he?" and Redfern asked the question with real interest.

In answer the miner arose and entered his cabin.

Soon he returned and in his hand he brought out a portfolio.

From it he took a large photograph, yellow with age, and several small ones.

"My wife wished me to destroy them, but somehow I could never do so."

"A photographer came to the school one day and we had our pictures taken."

"This is one of the old school-house which was

once a church, for you see the old graveyard around it."

"See the children's horses hitched to the trees, and the good old teacher with his pupils about him, two-score of us."

"It has been over twenty years since this was taken, so you cannot pick me out."

"Let me see if I can," and Redfern bent over the photograph.

Then he said:

"This is your wife, for it is so like your daughter's photograph."

"Yes; you are right."

"And this is you by her side."

"It is. I was eighteen then, and Ethel fifteen."

"And who is this youth behind you?"

"Hugh Hammond."

"Ah! a handsome fellow. He seems kindly enough, for his hand rests upon your shoulder."

"Prophetic is it not, for he stands behind me like an assassin!"

"It is a fine picture, and I should think you would prize it."

"I do; but, here is a large photograph of Hugh Hammond alone. He gave it to Ethel, and wrote that French line on the back, signing his name, the place and date."

Redfern took the photograph and saw a dark, handsome face, but one full of suggestions of evil, it seemed to him.

It was of a youth of twenty, who was dressed jauntily in a riding-suit and black hat, while he held a whip in one hand, a rifle in the other.

"It was with that whip he struck me, with that rifle he nearly gave me my death-blow," said the miner.

Turning the photograph over, Redfern saw there, written in a very peculiar hand:

"FRED-AVON SCHOOL HOUSE,

"Sept. 10th, 18—,

"Presented to

"MISS ETHEL ENDERS,

"as the counterfeit presentment of her devoted friend,

"HUGH HAMMOND."

"* *Le jour viendra, Ethel.*"

"Keep it, for it may help you to find him," the miner urged.

"I will keep it, yes, if you wish; but I know where to find him."

"Who?"

"The original of this photograph."

"Do you mean it?" excitedly cried the miner, springing to his feet and grasping Redfern's arm.

"I do."

"Where is he?"

"In his grave!"

"What?"

"Miner St. John, the original of this photograph, was your pretended friend, Trent Baxter, the Sharp from Texas, and I saw him hanged" was the cool response of the youth with the Scarlet Sombrero.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REVOLVER SHARP IN DEVIL'S RANCH.

THE young borderer remained all night at the cabin of the miner of Yellow Canyon, and the next morning he left him, feeling really cheerful, for he could not but feel that the man he had so dreaded was dead, as the Scarlet Sombrero vouched for it.

It was hard, very hard for him to come to believe that Trent Baxter, the man to whom he owed his life, was the one who had sought to take it in their boyhood.

He studied the photograph well, and recalled each feature of the Texas Sharp's face, his action and voice, and compared them with Hugh Hammond as he had known him.

The result was that he was almost, if not quite convinced, and gave Red Sombrero credit for being a very remarkable youth to see in the photograph his old foe after twenty years.

"Well, young pard," he said that night, as the two sat in the cabin together:

"Trent Baxter, alias the Texas Sharp, may be Hugh Hammond, and he may be dead and in his grave; but still life is sweet to most of us, and uncertain to all, and so I hold you to your pledge, if you hear of my dying here in the mines, to seek my wife and daughter and give to them the legacy I leave."

Redfern promised once more, and was soon after fast asleep.

But when he awoke in the morning the miner said sadly:

*The day will come.

"I had the same old dream, young friend."

"Dead men are not dangerous, Miner St. John, as I have had reason to find out."

"Living ones I stand in awe of; but can I mail your letter for you, as I go to Devil's Ranch?"

"I will thank you to do so, Redfern, though I am sorry to hear of your going there."

"Why?"

"Well, it is a perfect Purgatory on earth, lawless and filled with wild, desperate men."

"I've been there often before."

"Yes, I know that you have, and that you have no dread of anything, for such is your record."

"What do you think I have to dread there this time, Miner St. John?"

"You are going among men who admired the Sharp from Texas."

"Yes, many of them did."

"He has his friends there."

"I suppose so, such friendship as it was."

"They knew that he was hanged up in Colorado by Vigilantes."

"True."

"And that you tracked him to his death."

"Yes, I shall not deny that I did, if asked, though I shall not boast of it."

"It is not your nature to do so; but I only wish you were not going."

"Have no fear for me, my good friend, for somehow, I always have a getting out place when cornered," laughed the youth.

"Suppose I go with you?"

"No indeed, for I promise you I shall seek no trouble, in fact shun it, as I always do."

"Will you remain there long?"

"A few days at furthest, and then I go to Mexico as I told you."

"Upon another perilous mission to discover who the Vailed Lady of Mexico is, who came to Devil's Ranch, played cards with Baxter, and then, had you not saved his life, would have killed him."

"I had it all from his lips."

"Well, I am anxious to know more of the Vailed Lady of Mexico I admit, and where I am curious I am full of perseverance," said the Revolver Sharp with a light laugh.

Soon after he took his leave, and the last words of Miner Gray St. John he never forgot, for they were called after him.

"Sombrero, I feel as though I would never see you again."

As he turned the bend in the canyon Redfern glanced back and saw the miner standing where he had left him at the barrier, upright, silent, bat in hand and gazing sadly after him.

He never forgot the picture then and there impressed upon his mind.

There were no three better horses on the frontier than those belonging to Redfern, and they possessed wonderful speed and endurance combined, while they were thoroughly trained.

The two trotting along behind Rover followed unled, as obediently as dogs, and the youth felt no care regarding them.

He seemed to be perfectly familiar with the trails, and rode along, keen as were his eyes, without catching sight of a face peering at him through the bushes that grew upon the summit of a rock.

Twice the muzzle of a rifle peeped through the thicket and covered the form of the youth; but each time it was lowered, either in mercy, or from fear that the shot might not prove fatal.

And on the young borderer rode, following the trail that led to the broad one in the valley, several miles below.

Into this he turned, his eyes searching the trails recently made, and with the expression of one who read them perfectly.

It was nearing sunset when he entered a large valley, the hillside dotted with many cabins perched here and there, and near the center of which was a settlement so thick as to be called by the sojourners there "a city."

The real name of the place was Devil's Ranch, and it richly deserved the appellation, for there were gathered within the space of a couple of square miles as much real devilry as could be found the world over in an equal number of human beings.

Those who dwelt there possessing good traits at all, did so from necessity, to make money, for the mining-camps of Devil's Ranch panned out well.

With one-third good men, two-thirds were vampires feeding upon them, gamblers, outlaws and evil spirits in general.

The cabins which the youth passed, on his way to the "city," where men were seen, he touched his red sombrero politely, but rode in a quiet way as though he knew just where to go, and

meant to halt only when he reached his destination.

Riding up to the most pretentious structure in the place, the Revolver Sharp dismounted before the door, above which was a black sign on which was painted in red letters:

"THE NEW MEXICO HOTEL,

"PARD DU VAL, Boss."

A Mexican half-breed took his horses, another his pack, saddle and bridle, and entering the "hotel" the Revolver Sharp found himself in Devil's Ranch.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAINT OR SINNER?

"PARD DU VAL, Boss," of the "New Mexico," as he put himself on record on the sign over his hotel door, met the Revolver Sharp on the broad piazza, the floor of which bore sundry suspicious red stains which no scouring had ever been able to wash out.

He was a fearless-faced man, with a look half-Mexican, half-American, and dressed like one who was fond of displaying his wealth, all made in his public house.

He wore black broadcloth pants, a velvet coat, a blue shirt, a red scarf under the broad collar, and a sash of yellow silk about his waist, and in which nestled a pair of revolvers.

A diamond pin was in his scarf, and upon the first finger of his right hand was a seal ring, a bloodstone engraved with a skull and cross-bones.

His head was surmounted by a black slouch hat encircled by a yellow scarf, and he moved noiselessly, for he wore a pair of handsomely embroidered moccasins, the design being his favorite skull and cross-bones.

His noiseless movement had given him the name among his own servants of "Silent Foot", while the weird emblem on his ring and moccasins caused the miners to call him Death's Head, both of which sobriquets he seemed to take more as a compliment than otherwise.

"My dear Senor Redfern, I am too happy," he said with a smile and hand extended, while he spoke with a slight foreign accent which some said was assumed.

"Well, Senor Du Val, how do you do, and what news have you, sir, in the Ranch?" said Redfern, seemingly oblivious to all about him, yet taking in all that was to be seen and just who were in the hotel.

"The city is quiet, Senor Redfern, and needs brightening up, for there is but one subject of conversation now."

"And what may that be, senor?"

"Ah! you have not heard then that your old enemy, the Sharp from Texas, met with an accident up in Colorado?" and Du Val gave a sly wink.

"Oh yes, I was at the hanging," was the cool reply of Redfern.

"Sh! don't mention it, for the Sharp's friends are very touchy upon the subject, and somehow accuse you of having roped him in."

"I did not know that he had any friends."

"Well he has, and you just keep your eye on them, for they will play you foul if they can."

"Who are they?"

"The Senor Don Cavalho and Corallez of course."

"Two card-sharps, eh?"

"But I thank you, Senor Du Val, and now tell me what you can give me in the way of quarters?"

"The Vailed Lady's room of course, as we called the one which that mysterious woman occupied."

"That will be just what I wish."

"It was always the Texas Sharp's, you remember?"

"Yes, and mine too on several occasions."

"His ghost won't haunt you, senor?"

"Whose ghost?"

"The man you hanged?"

"See here, senor, I never touched a rope yet that was around a man's neck nor will I."

"I tracked Baxter to the end, and Border Justice strung him up, upon my assertion that there was no mistake in the man they had roped in."

"That is all there is about it."

"Then you do not fear his ghost will haunt you?"

"I fear nothing, senor, dead or alive," was the cool response of the youth as he followed the peon servants to the room given him, and which was the very best accommodation that Devil's Ranch afforded.

When he appeared at supper Redfern was decked out in his best costume and looked as handsome as a picture.

His broad-brimmed scarlet sombrero, encircled by a cord of gold, sat jauntily upon his head, while the pin he wore representing a human eye, held up the brim over his left temple.

His white silk shirt was spotless, as were also his white corduroy pants, and his boots shone like a mirror, while his spurs were bright, and jingled musically at every step.

About his slender waist was his scarlet silk sash, and with his long hair and handsome face he certainly presented a very striking though somewhat startling appearance.

The news had spread through Devil's Ranch that Redfern, the Scout of Fort Blanco, was at the New Mexico, and this was enough to cause a large crowd to assemble at the saloon of Senor Du Val's establishment, to see if there was to be any excitement attending his coming.

The death, at the rope end, of the Sharp from Texas was known now to all in the camps, and threats to avenge him had been running rampant everywhere, it was remembered.

It was recalled by many that Trent Baxter the Sharp from Texas, was not a bad man, that he had always a spare peso to lend a loafer, spent his money freely, had killed his men, when occasion demanded and buried them decently, while his faults no one seemed just then to recall.

Had a monument been erected just then in memory of Trent Baxter by the citizens of Devil's Ranch, the tribute to his virtues would have made a saint of him.

And right into Devil's Ranch had his slayer dared to come.

So it was that excitement was at fever heat to see who would be the one to take up the quarrel between the Sharp from Texas and Scarlet Sombrero, which had been interrupted by the death of the former.

And as the youth sauntered in a careless way into the supper hall, and was taken to a seat at Boss Duval's own table, every eye was upon him, the click of knives and forks ceased, the rattle of the plates and cups died away, and the hum of voices was hushed.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR A DEAD PARD'S SAKE.

THE youth in the scarlet sombrero ate his supper with infinite relish, as though he was not the cynosure of all eyes, and he did not hear his name spoken scores of times.

He conversed in a free-and-easy way with Senor Du Val, and when he had finished his meal, arose and sauntered out upon the piazza of the New Mexico, where a vast crowd had assembled.

Many crowded about him to grasp his hand, ask him about the hanging of the Sharp from Texas, and to warn him that some were in the Ranch who had it in for him to avenge Baxter.

Redfern had little to say, listened a great deal, smiled blandly at the threats, and when asked a direct question replied frankly that he "had attended the hanging ceremonies of Mr. Baxter."

"Are you going to play to-night, Redfern?" asked Pard Du Val, coming up and drawing him away from the crowd.

"Perhaps."

"Well, Senor Don Cavalho said that he had often heard of your skill as a card-player, and was anxious to test it to-night, so asked me to invite you to a game."

"Certainly, if the Don wishes it."

"I would advise you not play, Redfern," was the low warning given by the landlord.

"Ah, yes, I know he is a card-sharp!"

"He is a pistol-sharp as well," was the significant response.

"And means to win my money and then start a private burying ground with me, I suppose?"

"About that."

"I'll play with him, so where is he?"

"With Corallez and another, all three the devoted friends of Baxter as I told you before."

"I know Corallez, so who is the third?"

"El Paso Pete," he is called.

"I know him, so they are three of a kind."

"And you are but one."

"Wait until the band begins to play," was the laughing response.

"I have warned you, as in duty bound, being my guest, not to speak of my friendship for you."

"And just now I am in no humor to heed a warning; but tell me, can we not play at the table near the north window, and I wish to sit with my back to it?"

"Go and take the seat now, and I will tell the Don that you will play with him if he cares to join you at your table."

"Go now, and I'll come there and speak with

you, so as to have it look as though I had just found you!"

Redfern turned, and walking across the hallway sauntered into the gambling den of the New Mexico.

Fully two hundred men were gathered there, some drinking, others smoking, and the larger part playing cards at the various tables.

Redfern made his way to the table he wished and sat down with his back to a window, the shutter being closed.

There were many who passed around him, but he seemed not to observe the attention that he was attracting, and picked up a pack of cards which lay upon the table.

Then, a moment after, Pard Du Val joined him with an invitation from Don Cavalho to play a game with him.

"I have sat down here to play, Senor Du Val, and if Don Cavalho wishes to join me I will secure that seat for him."

Du Val departed and went over to where there were some men seated at a table together.

Two of them were Mexicans, attired in their national dress, and the other was half-scout, half-miner in his make up and looked the desperado he was.

The former two were Don Cavalho and Senor Corallez, Mexican gamblers and known as very dangerous men.

The latter went by the name of El Paso Pete and he was avoided by all on account of his quarrelsome nature, for the first to pick a quarrel he was always the first to "get the drop" upon the man whom he selected as a victim.

"He will play, you say, Senor Du Val, if I will join him at his table?" asked the Don with wish surprise.

"So he said, Don."

"I'll go over and clip the boy's ears for his impertinence, Don," said El Paso Pete.

"Better go to his table, Don, if you wish a game," remarked Corallez, with a significant look at his brother Mexican.

"Well, as he will not come here I will go there," and the Don walked over to the table where Redfern sat, while his two immediate companions followed with the crowd, for something in the way of a border entertainment was looked for.

Redfern's politeness was marked, but in this case he merely nodded to the Mexican and said:

"Don Cavalho, I believe?"

"I am, and you are Redfern, the Revolver Sharp."

"So they call me, Senor Don; but you wish to play with me, I learn?"

"Yes, for I have heard that you were a bold hand at cards."

"I play to win, senor, and like big stakes."

"Will you name what your figure is?"

"A thousand pesos are too much for you?"

"Name your figure and I'll match it, Don, if I have to sell out."

"Call it a thousand then."

Redfern bowed and the Don said:

"Remember, I tolerate no card-sharp tricks."

"In others, you mean."

"What do you mean by that?"

"As you are a card-sharp yourself, you play only with those who are not cheats."

The hum of voices ceased as the Don's dark face flushed and his eyes sparkled with anger as he asked:

"Do you mean to insult me, boy?"

"I simply gave you a dose of your own medicine, Don, and you do not like it."

"I repeat, do you intend to insult me?"

"How can I insult you, Don?" was the smiling response.

"See here, boy, you wish a quarrel with me, and I am more than willing to avenge my dead pard Trent Baxter, by playing a game with you in which life and death are the stakes," cried the Don savagely, and he dropped his hand toward his belt with his words.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SIGNAL OF THE DIAMOND EYE.

IN his talk with Don Cavalho, Redfern had kept his hands upon the table holding a silk handkerchief in them.

He had known that the Don's desire for a game of cards with him was to turn it into a quarrel on some plea, and with his two companions to see that there was no escape for him.

The knowledge had come to him that he had made enemies by running the Sharp from Texas down, and so he need expect little mercy, if any, and with big odds against him.

But he had his reasons for wishing to get near the Don, and as he saw that trouble must

come he determined to take advantage of precipitating it early in the action, so to speak.

When he sat at the table before the Don he took in the position and attitude of El Paso Pete and the other Mexican.

He saw that El Paso Pete had his hand upon his revolver, which was half drawn from his belt, while the Mexican's position was not as hostile as that.

When the Don was giving vent to his angry speech, Redfern involuntarily raised his hand to his red sombrero to perhaps place it more firmly upon his head, and the act caused a quick movement among some of the crowd, which, though he observed, he could not account for.

As the Don dropped his hand toward his belt all saw that he would draw before the youth, for he was quick as lightning and Redfern's hands were upon the table.

But the silk handkerchief was dropped suddenly, the right hand shot forward and striking the Don squarely in the temple his head fell forward upon the table, while, without being withdrawn an inch, only elevated, there came a flash and report, from a derring in the grasp of the Scarlet Sombrero, and El Paso Pete went down ere his revolver could cover the heart of the Don's intended victim.

But the derring was dropped on the table as the left hand of Scarlet Sombrero arose with one of his gold-mounted revolvers which had won for him the name of the Revolver Sharp, and it covered the Mexican comrade of the Don, whose hands went up with remarkable suddenness, and just in time to save his life.

To the amazement of Redfern other revolvers than his covered the Mexican, and half a dozen men stepped to his side, while one said in a low tone:

"We are here to obey the orders of the wearer of the Diamond Eye."

Redfern was almost thrown off his guard by discovering that he had secret friends near, without doubt the followers of the mysterious woman who was known as the Veiled Lady of Mexico, and who had given him the secret badge of the Diamond Eye.

His glance fell upon half a dozen of them, dark, bearded, wild-looking fellows who would be able backers even against great odds.

But Senor Du Val stepped forward now and poured oil on the troubled waters, for he cried as he pointed to the Mexican with upraised hands:

"Don't kill him, Senor Redfern, for you've punished the Don badly and El Paso Pete takes your bullet to the grave with him."

"The Don started the dance so he must pay the fiddler," and Du Val placed his hand upon the head still resting upon the table, and with a gash cut by the blow from the derring in the hand of Redfern.

"I have no desire to push the affair, senor, unless Don Carvalho wishes to renew the trouble at some future time," and Redfern turned to the Mexican he still held under cover, and continued:

"Shall it be peace or war, senor?"

"I have no quarrel with you, Senor Redfern."

"No more than that you, the Don and El Paso Pete sought to avenge Trent Baxter, and made a bad break of it; but as you cry quits, I say all right," and replacing his weapon, the Scarlet Sombrero turned to thank those who had so promptly and decidedly come to his rescue.

But not one of them did he see, for they had quietly slipped away.

He glanced earnestly into the many faces about him, but failed to recognize one of those who had responded to his unintentional signal of the Diamond Eye.

"Senor Du Val, I would like to see you when you are at leisure."

"I am going to my room," and Redfern walked out of the saloon, just as the Don raised his head and turned his bloodshot eyes upon the crowd.

"Did I kill him?" he asked, in a hoarse voice, and a shout of laughter greeted his words, while a miner cried derisively:

"Kill him? Waal, I guess not; but he put you ter sleep, and yer tuck mighty good keer not to wake up until he were gone, yer did."

The Don gazed at the speaker in a dazed sort of way, but made no effort to resent his words, and his comrade grasped him by the arm and said in Spanish:

"Come, quick!"

"Where?"

"Anywhere away from here."

"Why?"

"Do you not feel the blow he gave you?"

"Who?"

"That Scarlet Sombrero."

"Is he dead?"

"No, but El Paso Pete is."

"Did I miss him?"

"He knocked you senseless before you had time to draw."

"Who killed El Paso Pete?"

"He did."

"And you?"

"He had me covered, and I am no fool."

"Come, don't you be one, for the game is against us, and all know it was a job to do him, instead of meeting him on the square."

"I'll go."

"Now you are wise."

"But I'll have my revenge."

"That is for another time."

"Yes, another time," and the Don staggered as his comrade aided him to leave the saloon and go to his quarters, which he was glad to do, not only because he suffered from his wound, but he had felt that the tide had turned against him in Devil's Ranch and he knew what an object of derision a fallen hero is in border camps.

But the more he thought the more revengeful he became.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNKNOWN ALLIES.

WHEN Redfern reached his room he was in no way excited, but sat down by the open window and became lost in thought.

He however took the precaution to place the candle behind the door, so that a revengeful passer by might not recognize him and risk a chance shot, and he knew there were plenty of men in Devil's Ranch who would be glad of the opportunity to thus put him out of the way.

He was still thought to be in the service of the fort, and many hated him because he was one to put down lawlessness, while others remembered he had given Devil's Ranch certain calls in the past.

If he could be gotten rid of without danger to the one who pulled the trigger there were plenty to take the risk of being found out after the deed was done.

So Scarlet Sombrero wisely put the candle out of the way, and as he sat there in semi-darkness he had his revolver in hand in case that should any one come in the hope of catching him off his guard they would be the one that fell into the trap set for him.

It was some time before there came a rap upon the door.

"Come in," said Redfern cheerily, but the words would have been the death-knell to the man who entered that came to kill.

The door opened and the landlord entered.

He started at the words of his guest.

"Ah, senor, it is you, so I can put up my gun."

"Caramba! but you had me covered?"

"Oh yes, I didn't know just who it was."

"Why do you sit in this somber light?"

"I like it better than to have a bright one that may make me a target for lead from the outside."

"Redfern, you are a wonder."

"Thank you, senor; but why so?"

"You leave no act undone to defend yourself."

"I would not now be here had I been less cautious."

"Well, you need to be on the watch, for you have many foes, who are the worse from being openly friends."

"I watch even a friend in these parts, senor."

"You are wise; but you did for El Paso Pete."

"Yes, I shot to kill, and was just in time to save my life, for had I stopped to draw my revolver he would have killed me."

"I never saw more clever work, or quicker, than that handkerchief trick which hid your derring, and quick as was the blow you gave the Don, and hard too, your shot followed in half a second, while in as much more time your left hand gun covered the other Mexican."

"It was splendid, Redfern, splendid! and I would not have missed it for a thousand pesos."

"I am glad you enjoyed it, senor, but I did not, for it is painful for me to touch a trigger that sends a soul out of a human being, be they what they may."

"Redfern, you are older than you seem, for you are no boy to talk and act as you do."

"I am a boy in years, senor, only a boy; but an old man, a sad one indeed, in experience," was the low reply.

"Well, I have watched you ever since you first came to these camps, and I tell you that you

have made me your friend, and there is my hand upon it."

"I thank you, senor, and any true friendship is most acceptable to one who can count his friends on the fingers of one hand; but I wish to ask you something?"

"Yes, senor."

"Did you notice anything that occurred in that little affair other than the part I took in it?"

"How do you mean?"

"Did you observe that I had friends there?"

"I did notice it, and who were they?"

"I do not know."

"But they were your friends?"

"My allies say, for I never saw them before."

"Nor did I, for I did take notice that they were strangers to me."

"Strangers to you?"

"Yes, senor."

"But you have seen them before?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"This is strange, for I was certain that you could tell me who they were."

"No, never; and I am surprised that you did not know them."

"I do not; but did others note their action?"

"I think not, more than to see that you had backers, whom they doubtless thought were soldiers, or scouts from the fort, and this idea quelled trouble, I think."

"Yes, I am glad it did; but the Don meant to corner me, and have El Paso Pete kill me, as I plainly saw, so I hit the right man as it was."

"Yes, you made no mistake."

"I wish you would do something for me."

"Yes, Redfern, with pleasure."

"Go down and circulate among the crowd and see if any of them knew who my unknown allies were."

"I'll go at once, for if you do not know them, and I believe what you say, I confess to considerable curiosity to find out."

"And if you can drop a word that I am here to carry back with me certain bags of gold when I go, I'll esteem it a favor."

"You are up to some deep game, Redfern, I am sure."

"Well, I shall ask your aid in a secret way, whatever it is, to help me carry it out."

"I'll help you, you may depend upon it; but now to find out who those unknown fellows really are, who were so quick with their guns," and the landlord left the room upon his mission, while Redfern became once again lost in deep meditation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SECRET BETWEEN THEM.

IT WAS more than an hour before Du Val the "Boss" of the New Mexico returned, and to try the youth he gave a different knock from his usual one.

"Come in!" said Redfern, and the landlord found himself standing in the light of the hallway, while the candle having been blown out left his guest in the darkness.

"Hard to catch, you are, Redfern; but I have talked to half the men who were in the saloon."

"With what result?"

"Well, many saw that you were not alone, and they believed, as I did that you had aid from the fort."

"Did they not know the men who showed on my side?"

"Not a man of them!"

"Where did they go?"

"I give it up."

"I turned to thank them, and they were gone."

"Well, not a man I talked with saw how they went, or knew them."

"They observed the fact that you had half a dozen very bold allies, with more to be heard from if they were needed; but then when they began to ask to ask who they were they could not find one of them."

"It is a mystery to me."

"Did not one of them speak to you, for I thought that I saw one do so?"

"Yes, he whispered that they saw my signal and were ready to obey me."

"What signal?"

"That is what I do not know."

"You made none?"

"Not with any intention of doing so."

"Well, it is rather cheerful to know that you have allies when you need them, and those who showed themselves to-night have caused a rather wholesome fear of you, for men believe you are here for some purpose, and with a very large backing."

Redfern laughed, and replied:

"Why I am weaker than ever before, for I am no longer a scout at Fort Blanco."

"What?"

"It is true."

"You have had trouble then?"

"Oh, no, I resigned, and when I had a chance to become more than a scout," and the youth told the story of the Comanche raid upon the settlement, and the battle that followed.

"You are more of a mystery to me than ever, Redfern; but tell me; did you ever find out who that Vailed Lady of Mexico was that came here to kill the Sharp from Texas and but for you would have done so?"

"I discovered that she came from across the Rio Grande, and returned from whence she came; but what of the Don?"

"Oh! he hunted his den pretty quick, along with Corallez, who showed great nerve in getting his hands up over his head as quickly as he did."

"They are Mexicans."

"Yes."

"They are of a most revengeful nature of course."

"Do you consider all my countrymen are?"

"You are not a Mexican, Senor DuVal."

"I am not?"

"No."

"Why do you think so?"

"I do not think, I know."

The Senor Du Val turned pale and glanced somewhat nervously at the youth, while he said:

"You are mistaken, for I am a Mexican."

"By adoption, yes, for you went to Mexico twelve years ago, because you had shot your rival in love, who stole your bride from you by false statements."

"My God! who are you?"

"Don't be alarmed, for I will not betray you; but some one recognized you here a year ago and papers were sent for your arrest, or rather the arrest of Duval Driscoll, and knowing you as I did, and the many good deeds you had secretly done, I let the papers go back indorsed:

"No such a man as Duval Driscoll to be found!"

"God bless you, Redfern, you are indeed my friend, and I am yours for life."

"Well, let us drop the past and tell me what of El Paso Pete?"

"Oh they took him off for burial to-morrow."

"And did you hint about my intention to take some bags of gold soon by coach?"

"I did hint that I heard it said you were here on a gold hunt, that is getting *hush money* from many men whom you could send to the fort in irons if so you wished."

"That is a good idea, and I wish you would give out incidentally that I leave to-day week on Neil Burt's stage."

"I'll do it, Senor Redfern; but you may expect to be held up on the trail."

"That is just what I am after, Senor Du Val," was the reply that surprised the landlord.

"Just what you are after, senor?"

"Yes, and when the coach is held up on the trail you'll know why; but this is a secret, between you and I."

"It shall be so kept, Redfern, I promise you."

"But now I will leave you, for you must be tired and rest will do you good."

"Good-night, and don't forget that I appreciate what you have done, for me," and the landlord left Redfern once more alone; but it was long before the youth sought the rest he really needed.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR GOLD AND REVENGE.

THE week that Redfern passed in Devil's Ranch seemed not an unpleasant one to him, though there were a number of men there who had an uneasy feeling the while, the result of a bad conscience.

It was thought that he was there for no good, from the standpoint of the lawless spirits, while from the view of the honest miners of the camps, and those who wished a purification of the moral atmosphere, he was there for some good purpose.

Though he was not seen to speak to any one particularly, it was believed that he had a strong support there, and men were very careful to pick no quarrel with him.

And Redfern was equally careful not to go out at night where an assassin would lie in wait for him.

He did not appear to avoid any one, and each evening sauntered into the gambling den, and he seemed to enjoy winning large sums from his landlord.

Du Val was a crack card-player, as many had experienced to their sorrow, but somehow the Scarlet Sombbrero won regularly from him, and each game was for a large sum.

Senor Du Val paid up promptly, in little buckskin bags full of gold and it was estimated that Redfern had won many thousand from him before the week was up.

Curious ones discovered that the youth took his money to the hotel strong-box for safe keeping, and calculators made an estimate that he had deposited an equal sum with what he had won from the landlord.

This money was the cause of much talk, for it was hinted about that when Redfern had come with full powers to arrest certain individuals who were known to be fugitive from justice, the said parties remained at large, but gave out to their intimate friends that their freedom cost them considerable sums in gold.

The Don had not been out of his very comfortable quarters since the night that he made the mistake of his life in trying to avenge his friend Trent Baxter by proxy, said proxy having been El Paso Pete, who had kept his word to "die with his boots on."

El Paso Pete remained but a memory in Devil's Ranch, and a bad memory at that, for the mound that marked his last resting-place in the graveyard, was all that remained of a desperado at whose sudden demise not a tear had fallen, or a regret been expressed.

The Don was said to have been severely injured by the blow dealt by the derringer in the hand of Redfern; but Corallez was his devoted nurse and hoped his friend Cavalho would be able to get out within a week.

"Yes, after the Scarlet Sombbrero leaves camp," was the comment of a miner, and he seemed to have sized up public opinion in the case of the Don.

The Revolver Sharp made no secret as to his time of departure, for he was heard to tell Neil Burt that he would go out with him on his next run east, and he asked in a whisper if there was danger of road-agents being met on the trail.

"No, indeed, they have laid low since the news came of how you run Blue Jacket Bill's head into the noose of a rope, Pard Redfern," was Neil Burt's answer, and it was overheard by several, who said that the youth seemed pleased with the information.

When the day came for Neil Burt's trip out, Redfern said he was ready, and leaving his horse and traps at the New Mexico, he mounted the box with the driver.

Several passengers who had expected to go, failed to materialize that trip, and there were a number of curious fellows who stood around and saw some very heavy bundles put on board, which they knew was the gold of the Scarlet Sombbrero.

"Am I all that is to go, senor?" asked Redfern of Landlord Du Val, and when the reply came in the affirmative, all saw a very anxious expression sweep over the face of the youth.

But there was no backing out now, happen what might, and the coach rolled away on the trail eastward.

As it did so a man hastily left the crowd and made his way to a cabin half a mile distant, and situated upon the mountain-side.

As he entered a man met him at the door with the query:

"Well?"

"He has gone!"

"How many passengers?"

"He alone."

"With Neil Burt?"

"Yes."

"Did he carry his traps?"

"He had two closely-rolled Apache *serapes*, and they were heavy as lead, for I got a chance to lift them."

"Then he carried his gold that way?"

"Yes."

"Well, we must cross the range to where our horses are."

"Yes."

"You have the men, then?"

"Three of them, for if more passengers went, we were to go by for the other three."

"Yes, they will be sufficient; but we must lose no time, for it is a twelve-mile ride from where we strike the horses to the rocks known as the Blue Jacket Toll-Gate."

"But the coach has twice that distance to go."

"Yes, but Neil Burt is no slow driver."

"Come! now for revenge and gold with it!" and the two men, after locking their cabin door, started off at a rapid pace along the ridge.

After a walk of a mile they began to descend by a rugged trail to the valley beyond the

range, and in an hour after leaving their cabin came upon three men and five horses in hiding among the rocks.

"Come, men we have no time to lose, for we must ride for it."

"Come, it will be gold in your pockets, and the same in mine sweetened with revenge," and mounting one of the horses in waiting, the speaker led the way at a sweeping gallop along the base of the range.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DON'S REVENGE.

THE party of five horsemen did not spare the animals they rode.

They kept them at a sweeping gallop, along a trail that was dangerous to ride so fast; but the one in the lead set the pace and the others followed, though now and then a narrow escape was made from a terrible fall.

"The Don's in earnest," remarked one of the three horsemen, who with the other two who had been joined by the party on foot, rode in the rear.

"Yes, and he ought to divide well for risking our necks as he does," growled the next man to the first speaker.

"Well, I guess he will."

"He'll get the lion's share, you bet."

"No, I guess he wants revenge more than gold, from what I can learn."

"We are to hold up the coach, hain't we?"

"Yes."

"Who drives?"

"Neil Burt."

"A bad man."

"Yes, but we are five."

"Who else is along?"

"One man."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, but they say he is heavy with yellow metal."

"How much?"

"Don't know, but it runs up among the ten thousands."

"Well, a couple of thousand *pesos* apiece for us, we being five, wouldn't be a bad day's work."

"Not a bit of it; but maybe it will be more."

"I hope it is."

"I mean maybe we'll get more than two thousand apiece from the ten thousand."

"How can we?"

"One of us might be called in."

"Lordy! I hope it won't be me."

"Me too," and the dread silenced the two rear men.

At last the leader turned into a canyon which pierced the mountain, and a ride of a mile further brought them to the entrance of a wild and narrow valley.

Large boulders had broken away from the high, bold mountain-sides upon either hand, and rolling down into the valley had nearly choked up the entrance to it.

But a trail well defined was left, and at this the leader eagerly gazed.

"It has not passed, so muzzle your horses and get them hidden among the rocks yonder, for right here at the Blue Jacket Toll-Gate we will hold up the coach."

The men obeyed, and soon all five were grouped among the boulders, rifles in hand, and revolvers ready, for they meant that it should be a deadly attack, as dead men tell no tales, they decided.

Fully half an hour passed before the distant rumble of wheels along the rocky trail was heard, and the leader called the men to silence and ordered them to take their positions, to obey his commands.

Masks were passed around and all five put them on, completely hiding their faces, after which the leader handed to each man a blue jacket, which he drew on over his miner's shirt, or clothing.

Louder sounded the wheels, as the coach approached, and soon it came in sight, coming along at a slapping pace as though the driver knew that he was half an hour behind time.

Upon the box was Neil Burt, by his side a form which caused one of the two who had held the conversation together on the way to remark in a startled tone:

"As I live it's the Red Sombbrero!"

"Whew! if I'd have known he was to be the passenger I'd have backed down, unless we had more help."

"We are five against two."

"Yes, we count that in numbers, but that Revolver Sharp equals up things mighty sudden, and I'm going to see that he don't get a cover on me," and the speaker drew further back from view.

The trail was rough right at the rocky entrance

to the canyon, causing Neil Burt to slow down to a walk, and as the leaders passed into the trap, there sung out in a commanding voice:

"Fire!"

The five rifles flashed together and their aim was directly at the Scarlet Sombrero and Neil Burt.

And down from the box dropped both driver and passenger, while two of the outlaws sprung to the heads of the leaders and checked them.

And toward the coach dashed the outlaw leader, crying out:

"Now for gold and revenge!"

"Come, men! we bagged our game!"

"We have bagged our game, you mean, Don Cavalho," came in a stern voice, and the speaker came from where he had dropped from the coach-box and covered the breast of the masked man with a revolver.

At the same time Neil Burt arose also, like one from the dead, and the two held a revolver in each hand.

"Hands up, seniors, for not one of you have a loaded gun."

"Come, hands up, or die!" cried the Scarlet Sombrero, and each of his revolvers covered the outlaw's heart.

The Don's response was to throw his revolver forward and pull trigger.

But cap after cap snapped, and with a groan he raised his hands crying:

"There has been treachery here in my band!"

"No, Don Cavalho, for one of your band is in my pay, and he but obeyed my orders to see that there was no lead in your weapons."

"Manuel, just slip the irons upon these four gentlemen, after which we will take a look at their faces."

The man addressed as Manuel by Redfern was the silent one of the three who had been waiting with the horses and rifles at the base of the range.

He threw off his mask and quickly slipped a pair of handcuffs upon the wrists of Don Cavalho, whose mask he also removed, revealing the face of the angry Mexican, with the still unhealed scar upon his temple, which the deringer had made.

The other three outlaws were as quickly ironed, and Neil Burt said, with a laugh:

"Four inside passengers now, and for Fort Blanco, Redfern, you say?"

"Yes, as soon as I have written Colonel Rockwood a note by Manuel here, who returns to his command," replied Redfern, and taking from his pocket paper and pencil he hastily wrote a note to the commandant of Fort Blanco.

This he gave to Manuel, who hustled his prisoners into the coach and sprung in with them, while Neil Burt hitched four of the horses the outlaws had ridden alongside of his own team, and getting up to his box, with a farewell to the youth, drove on his way.

Redfern watched the coach until it was out of sight, and then mounting the Don's horse rode slowly back on the trail toward Devil's Ranch, evidently more satisfied with the success of his bold plot, than the Don was with the revenge and gold he had failed to secure.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COLONEL'S LETTER.

A SCOUT passing through Devil's Ranch, had seen and heard that Redfern was carrying a high hand there, so to speak, and when he reached the fort he told the story and it came to Colonel Rockwood's ears.

He sent for Texas Charlie, the scout, and questioned him regarding what he had seen and heard about the Scarlet Sombrero.

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir, but I heard he had left the town."

"Was he upon a spree?"

"Well, he was whooping up the place, sir, and was painting the people the color of his hat, from all accounts."

"I am sorry to hear this, for I did not know that Redfern drank."

"And he don't, sir; but he plays cards to win, and got into a game with a boss gambler there, a Mexican by the name of Don Cavalho, and a dangerous man."

"The Greaser had two pardes, as I heard it, to chip in against Scarlet Hat, and they were bad men from 'way back, one of them being El Paso Pete, the onerayest desperado in the lay-out, colonel."

"The other was a Mexican, and they turned the game against Scarlet, I guess; for he

knocked the Don into a trance, put a bullet into El Paso Pete's brain and held the Mexican pard up with his revolver."

"They say it was a sight to enjoy, and more, some told me he had backers by the dozen who chipped in with their guns ready to see Redfern out to the end."

"I heard too that he was winning dead oodles of dust from the Boss of the New Mexico, and it was hinted that he was scar-ing jail and gallows chumps by pretending to arrest them and getting cash down in hand to let them off."

Colonel Rockwood was deeply pained at this.

He felt that Redfern had left the Government service to turn desperado and gambler, as his actions showed, when he reported to him.

He felt a deep interest in the youth, and decided to write him a letter urging him to change his course, and send it by a special courier.

A couple of days after he sat down to carry out this good intention, when he heard the stage horn and soon after the orderly told him that Scout Manuel Moline wished to see him.

He knew that this was a special scout, whom his predecessor had detailed to serve under Redfern, and he had requested the youth to order him back to the fort.

"I can now learn the truth of these reports," said the colonel, as he bade the orderly admit the scout.

Manuel Moline came in and saluted the new commandant with marked politeness, after which, when told to speak, he said in a business sort of way:

"I have a letter for you, Colonel Rockwood, from Scout Redfern, who orders me to report to you for duty, sir."

"I have four prisoners, sir, awaiting your pleasure at the guard-house. I having come in with them on Neil Burt's coach."

"Prisoners, scout?"

"Yes, sir, the letter will explain."

The colonel at once read the penciled lines, written on leaves torn from Redfern's notebook.

As he read he opened his eyes wide with astonishment, and several times ejaculated in a pleased sort of way.

Redfern's letter to the colonel was as follows:

"ON COACH TRAIL
Saturday Noon.

"COLONEL MARTYN ROCKWOOD,
Commanding Fort Blanco:—

"SIR:—This informal communication will be handed to you by special scout Manuel Moline, whom I send to report to you with four outlaw prisoners just taken."

"Arriving at Devil's Ranch, I concluded that there were more of Blue Jacket Bill's men running at large, who should be taken, so I laid a trap to insure them, in which they greatly aided me as they were anxious to avenge their chief by getting rid of me."

"I accepted a banter with one, Don Cavalho, to play cards, and he was backed by two confederates, a Mexican known as Senor Corallez, and an American desperado who answers to the name of El Paso Pete."

"I saw that their game was to kill me, so I acted first, stunned the Don by a blow, and was forced to kill El Paso Pete, who had drawn on me."

"Corallez I did not harm as he obeyed my order of hands up!"

"I found in the landlord of the New Mexico here, a staunch friend, one I would recommend to you for secret work, and we planned to catch the Don and others of his band."

"I won nightly from the landlord, large sums of money, as a *tin*; and had him report that I was receiving much more by allowing criminals to buy themselves off from arrest, and this gold I was supposed to take with me to the fort on the stage driven by Neil Burt."

"Some nails wrapped in *serapes* served as well, and I left on the coach, and thanks to Scout Manuel Moline, we trapped the Don and the others of the band, who held up the coach at the Blue Jacket Toll-Gate."

"Moline had secretly joined the band under the Don, who was Blue Jacket Bill's lieutenant, and his testimony will hang the four men he takes as prisoners to the fort."

"He had drawn the bullets from the weapons of the outlaws, so that the fire upon Driver Burt and myself was harmless, and the latter was a most valuable ally in the capture of the outlaw quartette, and he and the scout deserve all praise."

"I return to Devil's Ranch upon the Don's horse, and shall go upon my way as intended to Mexico, while my address will be El Paso, Texas, as I told you. With respect,

"ROY REDFERN."

"P. S. The name of the landlord is Du Val, and he has stood by me in all my plans, and knows that I send you his name as a Secret Service agent in Devil's Ranch, if you care to use him."

Such was the letter of Redfern, and it showed how the stories regarding him when put in a different light had been to his detriment.

Turning to Scout Moline the colonel shook hands with him, congratulated him upon his services, and heard his story of the affair, which was largely in the praise of Redfern, while the scout added:

"And my testimony, Colonel Rockwood, will hang the Don and his three pardes."

CHAPTER XXII.

ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE.

REDFERN rode back to Devil's Ranch in a very good humor with himself.

He had, though no longer a special Secret Service scout, sent Manuel Moline back to the fort with four outlaws of the Blue Jacket Band, and shown Colonel Rockwood that he still held an interest in serving the Government.

There were strange looks cast upon him when he rode up to the New Mexico, mounted upon the Don's horse.

He had gone off that morning on the box of Neil Burt's coach, the supposed carrier of a large sum in gold.

Now he came back without his heavy *serapes*, and on horseback. What did it mean?

This question was upon every lip, and Senor Du Val as he came out to meet him put on a well-feigned look of surprise and cried:

"Why, Redfern, what does this mean?"

"I am back again, you see."

All hung breathlessly upon the replies of the Scarlet Sombrero.

"I see you are; but where is the coach?"

"On its way to Fort Blanco."

"Where did you leave it?"

"At the Blue Jacket Toll-Gate."

"Ah!" half a hundred men uttered this exclamation in chorus.

"And Neil Burt?"

"Is driving."

"You wasn't held up were you?"

"Yes."

"Who by?"

"Five Blue Jackets."

"And robbed?"

"No—we trapped the trappers."

"No!"

"Yes, we bagged the outfit."

"Killed them?"

"No, but the party went on to Fort Blanco in irons."

"And you?"

"Came back."

"But that is Don Cavalho's horse you are riding?"

"Yes, the Don was there."

"Did he go on the stage this morning?" asked Du Val with surprise that seemed real.

"No, he held the stage up at the Blue Jacket Toll-Gate, he and Senor Corallez, and others of a like stripe; but Neil Burt and I roped the bad lot in, and while the Don and his gang went on in irons to the fort, I came back here, for I have some business to look after," and the significant smile the young wanderer gave caused several guilty souls to quietly and with alacrity withdraw their presence from the crowd, for a man who is a criminal always feels that he is the one upon whom the eye of the law falls.

There was a hearty cheer given the Scarlet Sombrero at his words, though some present doubtless cheered for appearances only.

Redfern thus far had been seated upon the

Don's horse before the New Mexico, upon the piazza of which stood Du Val and the crowd.

Now he dismounted and giving the rein to the peon servant who had come to take the animal, he said:

"You keep the Don's horse, Senor Du Val, until the last will and testament of that gentleman is known regarding his effects."

As he entered the hotel he called to three of the most prominent of the denizens of Devil's Ranch, and asked them to accompany him and Senor Du Val to the cabin of Don Cavalho and Senor Corallez to see what was there and lock the doors until it was decided what the Government would do with the effects.

The party of five went over by night to the cabin of the Don, and when they signed a statement of discoveries made there, enough to prove that one of the occupants was the lieutenant of the Blue Jackets, and the other a member of the band, the papers were forwarded to Colonel Rockwood at Fort Blanco.

"You spoke to the colonel of me, Redfern, in your letter?" asked Du Val as the two were seated that night in the former's room together.

"Yes, as one who would be glad to act as Secret Service agent for him at Devil's Ranch."

"I thank you; but what will you do now?"

"Go to Mexico."

"When will you start?"

"To-night."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I wish to be on my way, and it may be, Senor Du Val, that I may write you, either by mail or a courier, while I'll tell you that my address will be El Paso, Texas, though this is for your benefit alone."

"Certainly, Redfern; but I regret exceedingly to see you go."

"There is one thing I wish you to do for me, and that is, keep an eye upon Miner St. John, of Yellow Canyon."

"He is a splendid fellow, his mine is panning out well, and every week or two he comes here for provisions, and buys from your store, I believe?"

"Yes, I know him, and like the man."

"Well, be good to him, and if you get the chance some time, ride over and see him, telling him you are my friend."

"Now I must get my traps together and be off."

An hour after, Redfern, mounted upon his bay, and with his other two horses following, rode quietly away from the shed, stables of the New Mexico, and took the trail leading down into Texas.

He camped the next morning several hours after sunrise, and rested until late in the afternoon, when he again began his journey.

By easy stages each day he went, until at last he came to the Rio Grande, and crossed over into Mexico.

Once he had crossed into the land of the Mexicans, he reversed his manner of traveling, for he camped all day in some secluded spot, and rode by night.

As day dawned on the second night's travel in Mexico, he halted upon a ridge which commanded an extensive view of the country around for many miles.

Located upon a wooded rise, or hill, a league away, was a large and strongly-built hacienda, house and surrounding walls built of adobe, and looking more like a fort than a house.

As the day brightened, from about the hills came large herds of cattle, horses and sheep, and with their mounted attendants they spread out over the vast plains.

"That is her home, and now I will seek her there,"

"Come, horses, there is rest for us soon, I think," and so saying Redfern rode forward,

followed by his faithful equine friends, and started on the trail for the grand old Mexican hacienda.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ITINERANT PARSON.

It was upon the second Sabbath following the visit of Redfern to the miner of Yellow Canyon, that the latter was again seated under the shed along the front of his cabin, and which by courtesy he called his piazza.

As was his wont he was dressed up in his best clothes for Sunday, and he had just begun a letter to his wife in far-away Maryland, when his horse gave a neigh, and looking up he saw a man standing at the barrier down the canyon, as though afraid to venture in.

"Come on, my friend, for you are welcome, heartily so," cried Gray St. John, and thus urged the stranger slowly got over the barrier, and advanced with dignified step toward the cabin.

As he approached, St. John, who had placed one of his rustic chairs for him, gazed at him with considerable interest.

He was a tall man, and looked taller from the fact that he wore a long-tailed black coat, single-breasted, buttoned close up to the chin.

He had a white collar, soiled by long wear, and a cravat which had lost its purity also.

To his back was strapped a soldier's knapsack, with a blanket tightly rolled beneath it, and a rubber coat and blanket on top.

Over one shoulder was swung a well-filled leather haversack, and in his hand he carried a stout staff, while a double-barrel shot-gun was the only visible weapon of offense or defense.

His pantaloons were black and tucked into top-boots, and his head was surmounted by a high black hat, the rim of which had been added to by placing the flap of a black slouch, cut for the purpose over it, and this hung down almost like a hood about his face.

He was clean shaven, his hair cut close, and he wore a pair of spectacles with a slight greenish tinge, as though his eyes were weak.

His face was a strong one, with an expression of simplicity and goodness in it which would quell any angry word or blasphemy a wild sojourner of the West might wish to fling at him.

"Well, stranger, traveling on foot through these wilds, eh?"

"But you are welcome, and I am glad to see you," said Gray St. John, extending his hand.

The stranger grasped and held the hand firmly, while he replied:

"I am a stranger in this vineyard of the Lord, my brother, but where we are called, there must we go."

"I thank you for your kind welcome, and I will rest with you on this holy Sabbath day, for I have journeyed afar."

"Do so, and I will have dinner soon, and can promise you a good one."

"I will be grateful, my brother; for I am ahungred, as I have slain no game this day, not willing to shoot on Sunday."

"You are a minister, I take it?" said St. John, kindly.

"Yes, an humble and lowly teacher of the Good Book, brother, and I have come hither to preach to the heathen in the camps of the wicked gold-gatherers."

"You must not judge us all alike, parson, for I am a gold-gatherer, and yet I try to live an honest life, while I work hard to get a fortune for those I love."

"You are wise, my brother; but what did you say your name was?"

St. John had not said, but with a smile he answered:

"My name is Gray St. John."

"St. John! a glorious name! and one you

should do all in your power to keep from the stain of sin."

"My name is Freeze—Ebenezer Freeze."

"Been long in these parts?"

"Nearly two years."

"I was told as I journeyed along, for I came by coach now and then on the way, that there is a large mining-camp not far from here."

"It is half a day's journey, parson."

"It beareth the name of Satan, I believe?"

"It is known as the Devil's Ranch, parson."

"Then it is there that I would go and fight wickedness."

"You'll find it a hard place, Parson Freeze, and it will be no easy task for you to get a foothold there; but they sadly need your services, and I trust sincerely you may be the means of doing much good."

"But you must not think of going to-day, so remain here to-night and I will help you on your way to-morrow by a lift on my horse for a few miles."

"And you, Brother St. John?"

"Ah, I can walk to where I put you in the right trail, and ride back."

"You are very kind, and I will give you a few tracts to read in your leisure hours, seed sown by the wayside, as it were."

He opened his knapsack, which the miner now saw had the emblem of the cross upon it, and took out half a dozen tracts, which he handed to the miner, who then arose and placing them away, set about getting dinner.

In an hour it was ready, and the itinerant parson gave thanks with a gusto when he saw what a really tempting meal he had sat down to.

Though simple, the miner found him a man of observation and good sense, and enjoyed his conversation.

He declined a pipe after dinner, as "an abomination of Satan," and then suddenly grasping the pipe he said in a wholly changed voice:

"Here, pard, give it to me, for I cannot resist the temptation."

"Well, my good friend St. John, you did not know me, did you?"

"My God! you are Trent Baxter!" gasped Miner St. John, while his face turned deadly pale.

"Yes, the Sharp from Texas, wholly at your service, St. John; but to all others Parson Ebenezer Freeze on a gospel trail through this land of sin," and the disguised man burst forth into ringing laughter, as he beheld the face of the miner, which was a strange study to look upon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WRONG MAN.

It was some time before Miner St. John could utter a word, after his exclamation of almost alarm, when he spoke the name of his visitor.

It was hard even then for him to recognize Trent Baxter in the man before him, though he knew that it must be, could be no other than the one who had saved his life, who had been his partner in the mine, and was known as the Sharp from Texas.

Then the words of Redfern came back to him, that the Sharp from Texas, Trent Baxter, was none other than Hugh Hammond.

He recalled that Redfern had said that he had seen him hanged as Blue Jacket Bill, the outlaw chief, up in Colorado, by the Vigilantes, and yet the supposed-dead man now sat before him, laughing at his look of wonder.

Was this Hugh Hammond?

Was it the Sharp from Texas?

As though to break a silence that was becoming painful to him, the stranger said:

"Why, Pard St. John, you give me no welcome."

"No, for I believed you dead, *Hugh Hammond!*"

The miner spoke the name at a venture, and his eyes fairly devoured the face of the man before him, to note his start, his sudden cry at being recognized as *Hugh Hammond*.

But there was no start, no change of color, and the answer came in a question:

"Who did you say you thought was dead, *Pard St. John?*"

"*You, Hugh Hammond!*"

"*Me?* And you call me *Hugh Hammond?*"

"Why so, my good friend?"

"Surely my sudden coming has not hurt your mind."

The miner groaned, for surely it was not *Hugh Hammond* that was before him.

"I called you *Hugh Hammond*, because I supposed you to have borne that name in the past, when we were boys together."

"My dear *St. John*, you are really ill, to get such notions in your head about our being boys together in the past, when we only met here in this canyon."

"No, I am not ill; but I fancied that you were a boyhood friend, then a foe, and taking advantage of the years that had passed since then were hiding your identity from me."

"But I was mistaken, I guess, yes, I am sure I was; but still I believed you to be dead, *Baxter.*"

"Why?"

"Well, after your leaving the fort, I heard that you had been hanged in *Colorado.*"

"That I had been hanged in *Colorado?*" cried *Baxter*, quickly.

"Well, it was said that the outlaw chief, *Blue Jacket Bill*, was captured there by *Vigilantes*, and hanged."

"And did you deem me to be that vile man?"

"It was so said by all that you were?"

"Was I not released from the fort by the man himself appearing?"

"Yes, but he was proved after all to have been one of the *Blue Jacket Band.*"

"This is strange, for after leaving the fort I went to *Mexico*, where I have some interests, and was returning here, hoping that the vile charges against me had blown over, when I met a friend who told me that I was believed to be the secret chief of the *Blue Jackets*, and if I returned to the vicinity of *Devil's Ranch* I would surely be hanged as such without trial."

"I am a bold man, *St. John*, and not to be driven from my purpose through personal fear, so I determined to come."

"But I went to *El Paso*, had my beard and hair cut off, bought these glasses and clothes, a razor and some other traps, and leaving the coach some distance from here came on foot to visit you."

"I was glad to see that you did not know me, for it told me how good my disguise was, and I am here to secretly hunt down my foes, and to prove my innocence of the charges upon me."

"Now you know just why I am here as *Parson Freeze*," and the *Sharp from Texas* smiled in a mock benign way which wholly changed the expression of his face.

The miner had listened with the deepest interest and attention to all that he said.

It certainly appeared like a clear statement of facts.

He could easily understand his coming in disguise, after the late charges made against him, for fear of getting into trouble from which there was no escape.

And now he came saying he had been in *Mexico*, when *Redfern* had told how he had seen him hanged in *Texas*.

If his story was true, then all charges against him were as false as he now believed the one to be that the *Sharp from Texas* was *Hugh Hammond*.

"Who told you that I had been hanged in

Texas, St. John?" asked the *Sharp from Texas* somewhat impatiently:

"The youth known as the *Scarlet Sombrero.*"

"That boy!"

"Yes."

"Well, my presence here is proof that he told what was false."

"Yes, but I can hardly believe intentionally so, for I saw a man in *Devil's Ranch* who was with the party of *Vigilantes*, and he knows you well and said that you were the man hanged, while they sent for *Redfern* to get his testimony and when he said that their prisoner was *Blue Jacket Bill*, the outlaw chief of *New Mexico*, they swung him up then and there."

"Well, they hanged the wrong man, my friend, for I am alive, well, and am here to stay," was the response of the *Sharp from Texas*.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PARSON AT DEVIL'S RANCH.

UNTIL late at night the pretended "*Parson Freeze*" and *Miner Gray St. John* talked together.

They went over all that had passed since the arrest of the *Sharp from Texas* by *Redfern* upon the charge of being secretly the leader of the outlaw band known as the *Blue Jackets*.

All that *Redfern* had reported, all that was the subject of conversation at *Devil's Ranch*, was gone over, and the miner was compelled to admit that he believed the *Sharp from Texas* to be a wronged man.

He did not regard him as perfect by any means, and he knew him to be a gambler, also an alleged desperado in the mines.

But he owed his life to him, and he had always found him honest, kind and a devoted friend.

The fact that the man hanged was not *Trent Baxter*, proved that the *Sharp from Texas* might be all that he claimed, an honest miner after all, whose unfortunate resemblance to the outlaw chief *Blue Jacket*, had caused him much worry, sorrow and peril.

There was one glad thought to *miner St. John*, and that was that the man hanged in *Colorado* for the *Texas Sharp* was really *Hugh Hammond*, his old boyhood foe.

He must also have been *Blue Jacket Bill*, the outlaw chief, and therefore *Trent Baxter* was not.

If the man hanged by the *Vigilantes*, whose resemblance to *Trent Baxter* was so striking, was *Hugh Hammond*, then he could dismiss all fears at once of dying by his assassin's hand some day.

So, thinking over this, *Miner St. John* became almost cheerful, for it came to him that before long he would see his loved wife and daughter at their *Maryland* home.

"Well, *Baxter*, I am more than glad to find you my friend as in the past, and that you were not the real outlaw leader they accused you of being."

"That man who was hanged must indeed have borne a startling likeness to you; but there is bitterness felt against you by many in *Devil's Ranch* and you will do well to remain here working in the mine with me as before, until we can go away together and a different life be ours."

"You saved me from the bullet of that Mexican assassin, *Juan the Fox*, and I have a strong affection for you and my home is yours, here and elsewhere, as long as you care to share it with me."

"So, *Parson Freeze*, just keep away from *Devil's Ranch* and remain here quietly with me."

"You are ever good and kind, my dear *St. John*, and I will make your home here mine, as before, for I passed some pleasant days here with you."

"But I have a restless nature, and am curi-

ous to know what men say of me, so must go to *Devil's Ranch*.

"Yes, there is work there for *Parson Freeze* to do," and *Baxter* changed his voice into sepulchral tones, and looked meek as *Moses*.

"Suppose you have to preach for them?"

"Ah, I'll do it! you just ought to hear me, and I'll convert the miners, too."

"It's about my best plan to keep from being shot, though should there be trouble, this knapsack is not as harmless as it looks, and I might find a gun if I needed one."

"See here!"

He took up the knapsack as he spoke, and the miner saw that it was made upon a stout frame.

It opened in front, but upon either side there was a slide, which no one would suspect, and the space revealed was just large enough for a revolver.

In fact there was a revolver in each side, ready for use.

"And see here," continued the *Sharp from Texas*, taking up his high hat and looking into it.

A large red bandana was visible, but under this was a case which the ordinary observer might mistake for a *Prayer Book* or *Testament*; but within it, nestling comfortably, and loaded, were a pair of derringers.

"I might find a bowie in my bootleg, if I looked," continued the *Sharp from Texas* with a smile.

"Yes, you are a walking arsenal, with your shot-gun included."

"Yes, and one barrel of that is rifled, so I could make a great fight if cornered, and surprise the enemy with what *Parson Freeze* could do; but I hope no such incident will happen."

"Then keep away from *Devil's Ranch*, for keener eyes than mine may penetrate your disguise."

"No, indeed, for the *Scarlet Sombrero* is a reliable witness, and he has stated that he saw me hanged."

"I'll drop in on the camps to-morrow and stir up the miners," and the *Sharp from Texas* laughed heartily at the thought of what he called the fun in prospect.

The next morning he mounted the miner's horse and rode away toward *Devil's Ranch*, promising to turn the animal loose after getting half-way, for the miner said that he would come back home in a gallop.

When *Miner St. John* came out of his mine at noon he found the horse awaiting at the barrier and as he unsaddled him and turned him loose, he said:

"Well, how strange all this is; but *Baxter* is true as steel, and I must convince young *Redfern* of the fact some day, when I dare surprise him by telling how the man he helped hang up in *Colorado* was not the *Sharp from Texas* after all."

And that same afternoon the citizens of *Devil's Ranch* were startled half-out of their wits by seeing a real live parson come into their camps.

He came along the stage trail singing in a melodious voice the fine old hymn:

"Turn, sinner, turn,
Why will you die?"

Some laughed, others stood spell-bound, a few fled as from a pestilence, and still more fell in behind the pretended parson, a few joining in with him in singing, while he went to the *New Mexico* where *Boss Du Val* bade him welcome with the words:

"Parson, I'm glad to see you, for this town needs you, and wants you bad."

"Make the *New Mexico* your home without price, and if you can convert some of the rough old pine knots in these camps, I'll chip in a golden onza every time you start your hat on its round for dust."

"I'm proud you are here, parson, and my word for it the boys will all get drunk in honor of your coming."

"Come up, gentlemen, and be introduced."

And the heathens came with a rush equal to what they would have done, had Boss Du Val asked them to take a drink, an invitation it was a fighting insult to decline.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VAILED LADY OF MEXICO.

If the grand old hacienda in Mexico, whither Redfern had gone, looked like a fort, to gain admission to, the one who ruled there was equally as difficult as obtaining an interview with royalty.

In the line of cowboys surrounding the hacienda one found an outer guard, and when Redfern rode forward he was met by several horsemen who barred his way and were well armed to maintain their position.

"I would see the Senora Dolores if you please?" said Redfern politely to the one who brought him to a halt.

"The senora sees no one, senor."

"She will make an exception in my case."

"In no case, senor, unless you have the password."

"Ah, yes!" and the youth raised his hand to his hat, where was the strange pin he wore, representing a human eye.

It was of gold, the eye proper being of onyx, pearls and a diamond pupil.

It turned upon a swivel, and touching a spring the youth gave it a turn revealing a second eye, like the other excepting that instead of the onyx, representing a black eye, were turquoise, to represent a blue eye.

The *vaqueros* bowed and saluted as Redfern gave the secret signal and the spokesman said:

"Pass on, senor, and the guard at the wall gate will admit you."

The Scarlet Sombrero returned the salute and rode slowly on up the hill to the massive and high adobe wall surrounding the hacienda.

He was admitted, his horses taken, and a peon servant led him through a spacious hall to a luxuriously furnished room where he refreshed himself before being admitted to the presence of the Vailed Lady of Mexico.

Upon a former occasion he had daringly gained entrance to the hacienda and met the mysterious woman who had come to Devil's Ranch, and unknown to all, her face unseen by all, had sought to take the life of the Sharp from Texas.

He, Redfern, had prevented her, and departing from the camps by coach, he had followed her to find that she had left the vehicle on the trail, had been met by a body of horsemen and rode away, more of a mystery than ever.

And taking the trail, Redfern had followed her, and by pluck alone had gained admission to her presence in the disguise of a Mexican officer of Lanceros.

She had not been angry with him, but instead had seemed strangely drawn toward him, and more, gave him the secret badge of the Double Eye, which she had told him would ever admit him to her presence, and more, might serve him some day better than he had any idea of.

These thoughts passed through the mind of Redfern as he stood in his room awaiting to be taken to the presence of the strange woman who held a strange influence over him, though her face he had never seen.

He had not long to wait before a peon came and said that the Lady Captain would see him.

He was led through a grand hall, across a plaza where fountains played and flowers bloomed, and into a room where the furniture and surroundings were magnificent.

There, in an easy-chair, sat the Vailed Lady.

She was still heavily veiled, and dressed in the deepest black; but she arose and extended him her hand, which was gloved, even to the arm, so that he could not tell

what she was, Mexican, Indian or American, for her speech did not betray her.

"I am glad to see Senor Redfern again, and hope he has come to accept my invitation to dwell here, and become, as it were, my aide, for you know I told you that I was, though a woman, a commissioned captain of Lanceros in the Mexican Army?"

Her voice was low, melodious, and very winning.

"I have come to accept your kind invitation, yes, senora, and more, I have come to tell you that the man known to you as Trent Baxter, the man known in New Mexico as the Sharp from Texas, is dead!"

"Dead!" and the voice had changed now from sweetness to harshness.

"Yes, Lady Captain."

"You know this?"

"I saw him hanged, senora."

"Ha! hanged? Then I am avenged."

"But was yours the hand that hanged him?"

"The Vigilantes of Colorado hanged him, and knowing that I had tracked him down, they sent for me to verify that it was Trent Baxter."

"This I did, and they at once hanged him."

"I had not heard of this, for not one of my own people dared come to me and tell me he was dead, though I felt sure that they held some secret they kept from me."

"This then was it—his death."

"And you tell me that you know this to be true, that you saw him hanged?"

"Yes, senora."

"Senor, that man, Trent Baxter, wronged me and mine once beyond all forgiveness."

"I had vowed to bring him to death, and, as you know, I sought him, and you saved him from my avenging arm."

"Now you bring me word that he is dead, and I thank you."

"You have come, you say, to accept my earnest invitation to make your home here."

"Is it not so?"

"Yes, Lady Captain, I resigned from the United States service to come here."

"I had kept a vow I had made, to avenge my parents and sister, who were slain by Comanches, their home burned over their dead bodies, their scalps taken off by the red fiends, while I, but a boy, their prisoner, saw all."

"They kept me a prisoner for two years, when I escaped, and returned to my desolate home, for ashes and graves alone remained."

"A good man found me there, and he took me away to educate me."

"He was a Mexican of wealth, and he brought me among refined people, and educated me until his death, when he left me a little fortune and my own master."

"Then I went to Texas and educated myself to take the trail as an avenger, to claim lives ten-fold for those I saw taken from those I loved."

"I kept my vow, my mission is done, and I come to you, senora, as you asked me to do, and I await your commands."

"You will find them easy, senor, and it is my duty to tell you that I inherited a large fortune, from my father, who was an officer of Lanceros."

"For noble services the rank of captain was given as an heirloom to our family, and I being an only child, received it."

"I have served my country well. I have a company of men under me, and besides, am Chief of Government Detectives upon the Rio Grande border."

"And you are to be my aide, Senor Redfern."

"I had vowed never to go unvailed until Trent Baxter was dead."

"He was my husband, and he deserved the death he met, upon the gallows."

"I will meet you at dinner, Senor Redfern, and I will be unvailed, so that you may see the face of your adopted mother."

CHAPTER XXVII.

OBEYING THE CALL.

WHEN Redfern met the Lady Captain at dinner time, he found that the table was set for but two persons, while half a score of peon servants stood in waiting.

He noted that the service was of silver and the finest china, and the room was a perfect bower of beauty, with a flower garden outside the veranda, and fountains sending tiny sprays of water high into the air.

Then he heard the rustling of a dress, and turning beheld the Lady Captain, Senora Dolores.

She had cast aside her black costume, her long, impenetrable veil, and stood before him in the exquisite costume of a Mexican lady.

Verging upon two-score years, she yet looked scarcely thirty, and a face more beautiful, more lovable, Roy Redfern had never beheld.

It was the original of a portrait in the room where she had received him, and which he had believed, upon his first visit, to be her own likeness.

Her form was exquisite, and the face won him at once, as had her portrait, only there was much in it of sadness tinging its beauty.

Old enough to be his mother she was, yet she did not look it, and only having known a mother's love as a boy, he felt drawn toward her as he never had been to any other woman before.

It was this love of her portrait, this loving to hear her voice, to be near her, which had caused him, after having kept his vow to avenge his dead kindred, to go back to Mexico.

"Remember, Roy, you are my son now, I your mother, for from to-day I adopt you as such, and in the love of so noble a boy, I can put the cruel, bitter past behind me."

So she said as she took his hand, and led him to his seat at the table.

If her people wondered at the Lady Captain's adoption of Redfern, they said nothing, for the Senora Dolores had a way of doing as she pleased, and allowing no interference.

Redfern was made her aide, and as such was master of her estate, her people, and field commander of her cowboy soldiers, who were wont to render good service against the Indians.

Thus several months passed away, and one day Redfern found a letter awaiting him.

It had come from El Paso, whither he had sent to see if there was anything for him.

The letter was as follows:

"THE NEW MEXICO,
March 11th, 18—.

"MY DEAR REDFERN:—

"As you requested I write you to El Paso, hoping my letter will find you."

"You remember that you asked me to keep an eye upon your friend, Miner St. John, in the Yellow Canyon."

"I did so, and we had some pleasant talks together when he came here after stores."

"Last Monday week he was to have come, and as he did not put in an appearance yesterday, I rode to-day over to Yellow Canyon."

"I found his cabin, the door open, the place robbed, and a grave in the canyon I felt must be his."

"I opened it and found my fears verified."

"He had a bullet-wound in the back of his head, had been wrapped in a blanket and hastily buried."

"I at once returned and am now writing to you, after having made every endeavor to discover who his murderer can be."

"Robbery was the cause, of course; but then, why did his murderer bury him decently?"

"You may remember that Juan the Fox, a Mexican, once sought to take his life, but was foiled by the Sharp from Texas?"

"I have heard that Juan the Fox has been seen about here of late, and will have him taken, if I can find him, on suspicion."

"I merely give you the facts, leaving for you to decide whether you will come and solve the mystery."

"The camps have had a parson here of late, and some of the toughest ones were converted; but the good parson has come to grief, we fear, as he disappeared most mysteriously a few days ago and the Devil's Ranch is in mourning for him."

"A number of the boys went over to Fort Blanco

last month to see the execution of your prisoners, the Don and his party.

"The four of them were hanged, and the boys enjoyed their trip immensely, and heard many stories of your daring deeds, and all wonder what has become of you.

"I have been doing a little Secret Service work for Colonel Rockwood, upon your recommendation, and will be glad to help you if you decide to trail the mystery of poor Miner St. John's death.

"Let me hear from you, and believe me to be:

"Always faithfully yours, "DU VAL"

One hour after receiving this letter, Redfern was mounted upon Rover and on his way to New Mexico, his heart aching at the sad end which had befallen poor Miner St. John, while he was determined to carry out the pledge he had made to him that night in Cabin Lonesome.

To the surprise and delight of the landlord Du Val, the Scarlet Sombrero dismounted before the New Mexico, late one afternoon.

He was warmly welcomed, and when the two sat together that night in the room known as the Vailed Lady's the landlord told all he knew of the discovery of the dastard deed at Cabin Lonesome.

"We will go there to-morrow, and I will see if his secret hiding-places for his gold were found and robbed," said Redfern.

And then the conversation turned upon the youth, who told Du Val that he was living in Mexico, the adopted son of the Vailed Lady, and he added:

"It was her people who came to my aid that night when I shot El Paso Pete, and who were unknown to us.

"I wore a badge the Vailed Lady had given me, and they happened to be here and stood ready to aid me if I needed it."

"Well, I can only say that you are in great good fortune," replied Du Val, and arranging to go to the cabin of the dead miner the next day, they retired to bed to make an early start.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

REDFERN arrived at the cabin of Miner St. John with Landlord Du Val, to find all as had been reported to him, and worse, for the secret treasure was gone.

He at once took the coach Eastward, and in due time arrive at the home of Mrs. St. John, but he was too late, for the Sharp from Texas had been there before him and started with mother and daughter for Mexico, or at least Redfern so decided, after investigating matters.

He was quick to follow, and his adventures in hunting for the wife and child of the man he had pledged himself to protect, would fill a volume and read like a romance.

The grave only of the mother he found, for she died on the trail to New Mexico; but Ethel St. John he did find, and he carried her to his adopted mother, Senora Dolores, who received her gladly as her own daughter.

And if the wrong man had been hanged by the Vigilantes of Colorado, from his fatal resemblance to the man who had taken his name, in time Redfern brought the right man to the rope's end, and there was no mistake that time, for it was the Sharp from Texas, the one whose photograph he had recognized, once known as Hugh Hammond.

Loving America as he did, Redfern prevailed upon the Lady Captain to come there to dwell, and the elegant home she found in California even surpassed the grand old hacienda in Mexico where she had been known as the Lady Captain of Lanceros.

THE END.

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- 541 Jeff Flicker, the Stable Boy Detective.
- 551 Nick Nettle, the Boy Shadow.
- 559 Harlem Jack, the Office Boy Detective.
- 569 Brooklyn Ben, the On-His-Own-Hook Detective.
- 577 Pavement Pete, the Secret Sifter.
- 588 Jack-o'-Lantern, the Under-Sea Prospector.
- 603 Wide-Awake Bert, the Street-Stealer.
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